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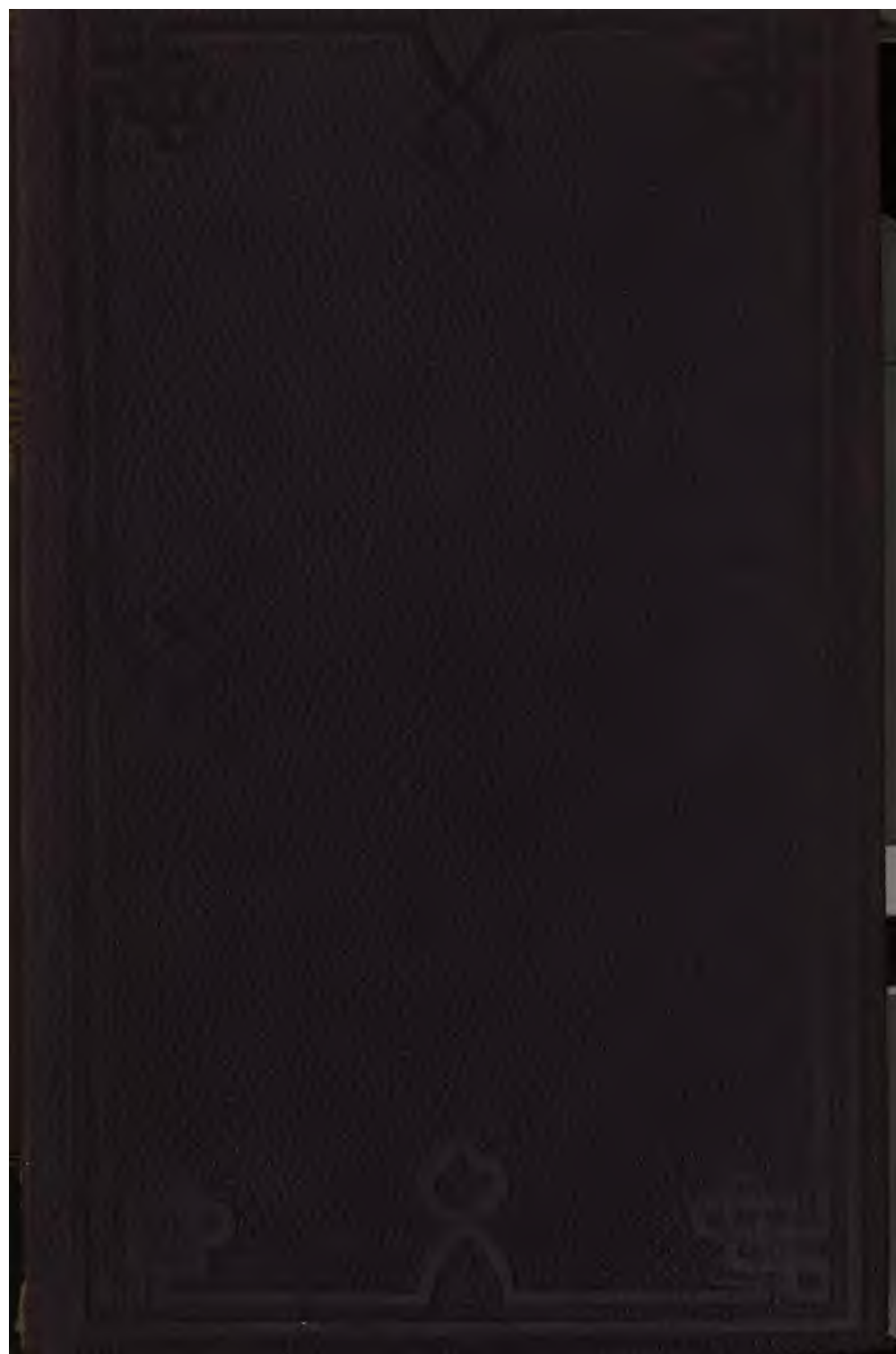
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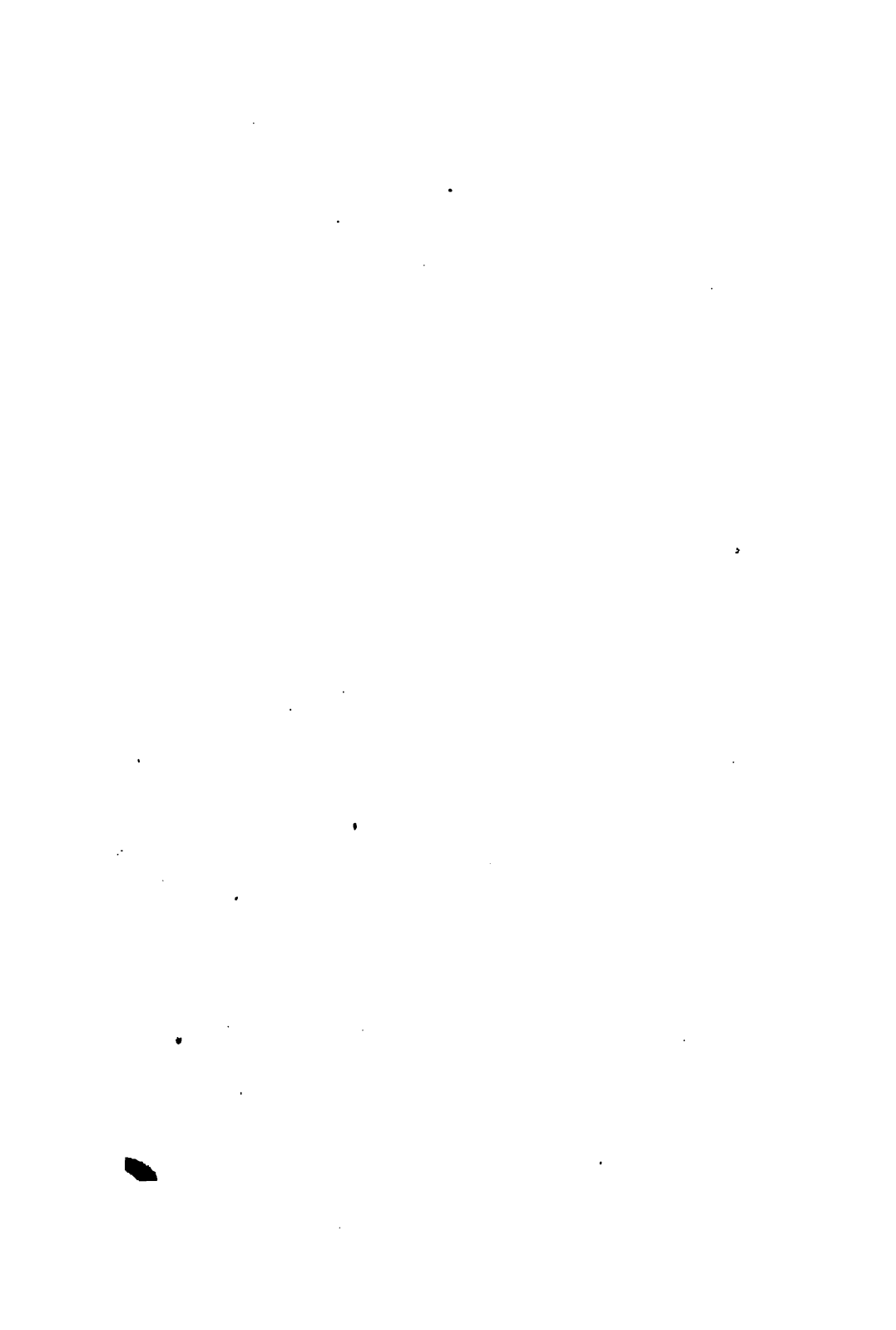




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# THE CASTLEFORD CASE.

BY

FRANCES BROWNE,

AUTHOR OF

“MY SHARE OF THE WORLD.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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# THE CASTLEFORD CASE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A FEARFUL VISIT.

THE days of holly and mistletoe were approaching, and preparations were on foot for them and the visitors who were expected from London, when one day, after a long drive through the Essex farms, Mr. Leiton and party came in rather late for dinner, which then took place some two hours after dark.

Annie had spent some minutes in Mrs. Berkley's room, admiring a Paris cap she had been told of in the morning. Suddenly the bell rang, for Leiton was punctual. "I have little dressing to do," thought Annie, as she hurried to her room.

The red coal fire had burned low, but she found a candle on the dressing-table, and stooped to light it. As the girl rose from that position, and the first gleam of the lighted candle shone on the darkened room, she



caught a glimpse of a face peeping in at the half-open door. It was but an instant—a mere glance of the eye—yet Annie knew it, with a knowledge that made the cold sweat break from every pore, for the face that peeped in upon her was that of the first Mrs. Herbert. Annie didn't faint, didn't scream; she had presence of mind to keep the candle from falling, but her eyes closed in spite of herself; and, when she looked again, there was nothing but the half-open door, and the deep darkness beyond. Yet it was no trick of the imagination, no cheat of the eye. That the face had looked in, and that she had seen it, Annie felt as certain as of her own existence. The face that had lain more than a fortnight in the Stour, been preyed on by pikes and eels, and mouldered for nearly three years in the walled-up vault of the Windhams—there was no trace of all that upon it—none of the fixedness of death; on the contrary, its life-likeness struck Annie with double fear; and, brief as the glimpse had been, she noticed that there was an alteration, like that which the lapse of time might have made. The hair was greyer, and the crow's feet deeper about the eyes.

We have said that Annie was a brave girl. She had that moral courage which none but strong and honest minds possess. The physical, though a noble thing after its kind, depends chiefly on nerve and muscle. Annie Hope had run from Mr. Johnstone on the road, and locked herself in the back-parlour; now she made a desperate effort to master that fear of all the most strange and terrible. With the help of God she would open the door, and see what stood beyond it. There was nothing. She looked round the winding passage

outside; there were three doors fast shut, but no sight, no sound, except a coming step. It was Fritchine, Mrs. Berkley's German maid.

"Miss Hope's hand-shoes," she said, presenting a pair of gloves, which Annie had forgotten in her mistress's room.

"Thank you, Fritchine. Did you see anyone about here?" Annie scarcely knew what she said.

"No. Did Miss Hope see anyone?" said Fritchine, with a look of scared intelligence in her honest German face.

"I thought I did, but it must have been fancy." Annie was trying to tell a falsehood, for the sake of the house, but Fritchine knew better.

"I'll wait for Miss Hope, and see her down to dinner."

Wait she did. Annie went down mechanically, took her seat at the table, and answered two or three commonplace queries from the Misses Leiton, without exactly knowing what they were about. That glimpse through the half-open door had explained Mr. Johnstone's allusions, Leiton's dread of the long evenings and love of visitors, the change of servants, Herbert Windham's fits, Mrs. Leiton's accident in her own room, and the confused talk thereon. The old-world stories concerning those who came from the grave were then true, for she had seen one of them, and seeing is believing. The handsome, pleasant country house had a visitant from the vault under the old church, a comer not to be shut out by bolt or bar. No wonder Herbert and Jessie looked uneasy and old before the time; no wonder the Leitons, one and all, had grown subdued

and serious. Had secret bloodshed this terrible power in it? Was there a murder to come out? How different the well-furnished dining-room and table looked to Annie that evening! How different the dinner tasted in the shadow of that fearful secret! She had rejoiced in coming to Castleford, as a city of refuge from Mr. Johnstone; but how willingly would she have gone back again, and heard him thumping with his stick at the locked door, rather than sleep in her own room that night! It was one of the old back ones, against which she had been warned; Annie had taken notice of that before. The winding passage round which she had looked in her terror formed a communication between the long ancient wing, at the end of which Miss Law's cottage stood, and the wide corridor, with bedrooms on either side, which occupied the first floor of Castleford Hall. There was the meaning of the old man's unintelligible threat, "You'll see worse than me in Castleford, maybe."

"Annie, you have eaten no dinner, and don't look yourself to-night. What's the matter, my girl? Have you got a headache?" said Herbert.

"Not a great one."

The apology was too convenient not to be caught at; but she stopped as the footman, who always brought up the letters—and the Castleford mails now came in the evening—presented the silver salver with one for Miss Hope, and several for his master. Annie's was from her father and brothers. They wrote on one large sheet, and were full of coming to meet her in Castleford. How differently that promise of the Christmas meeting sounded to her inward ears from what it would

have done three hours before. She would write to her father. The boys should not come there: perhaps they would be quartered in the back-rooms too.

"What's the news, Herbert?" said Jessie. Her lord and master had read his letters hastily, and, it seemed, with little pleasure.

"Well, not much. Corks can't come, neither can the Bennetts, and Mr. Frowd Fletcher writes me a very odd letter about—about—nonsense that an attorney in Colchester is talking." How like his confused mother Leiton looked! "Those people of the bank are going to have another meeting; they can't make out the forgeries or catch Spyers," and, hastily gathering up the opened letters, Herbert thrust them into his pocket, and Jessie made no remark but "Dear me!"

All the rest of the evening Annie was forging excuses for sleeping anywhere but in her own room. She could open the door and look round the passage when the first horror of that sight left her power enough; but to walk in deliberately, close it, and go to sleep there, was beyond Annie's ability. Yet how was the room to be escaped? The cause of her wishing to leave it could not be told to Jessie, to Herbert, to any of his sisters, still less to a servant—and what was she to do?

"If you please, Miss," said the housemaid, coming to the corner where she sat pretending to read, "Mrs. Berkley wants you to sleep in the room next hers. It was made ready for the London gentleman; but I think you may have it—that's if you don't like your own, Miss."

"No, not exactly," said Annie, and the housemaid looked as if she could ask another question—all the

down-stairs people in that house had got independent ways—but Miss Hope read on with great application. Fritchine had told her mistress of the passage interview, and Annie found opportunities, in the course of her after-life, to acknowledge the service thus rendered by the honest German maid. In the meantime, she retired to her new quarters at the accustomed hour, in great gratitude to Mrs. Berkley and Fritchine. It was true that the same sight might be seen at its half-open door, or even within; but Annie was not in the old back-rooms. She could hear the maid and her mistress moving about, for the partition was thin; she could see through a chink that they kept a light burning all night—and she did the same—it was common in Castleford Hall. Perhaps Annie said her prayers with more than usual fervour, and was in no hurry to go to bed; but she saw nothing—heard nothing out of the usual course, and rose next morning determined to write to her father—not the whole story; it was too strange to put on paper. He would think she was giving way to fancies—it might vex and annoy him; and among strangers as he was. But Hope had a presentiment against the place; he would understand her if she warned him that something was wrong, and not to bring the boys.

Mrs. Berkley did not come down to breakfast. Her maid said she was not quite well, and would be much obliged if Miss Hope would come and sit by her bedside. She wanted to hear the news from her father in Liverpool. Annie went up with the letter in her hand—Mrs. Berkley made-believe to read it, told Fritchine she should not want her for an hour; and when she had seen the door fairly shut, the old lady sat

up in her night-dress, looked Annie straight in the face, and said, "Now, my dear, I am as nearly related to the Leitons as you or your father. Tell me honestly what you saw last night in your own room when you went to dress for dinner."

Annie hesitated for a minute, and then seeing no reason to the contrary, unburdened her mind by telling Mrs. Berkley plainly and distinctly what she had seen. It is strange that the terrors are never taken off such tales by relating them. Annie saw her own horror reflected in the old and thoughtful face—there was no doubt in it, the cautious canvassing lady of Berkley Villa never suggested that she might have been dreaming, but leant back on her pillow, clasped her hands, and said—

"Oh! Annie, this is a fearful house, and fearful suspicions begin to darken round my latter days. I wish we were not related to Herbert Leiton."

"Do you think he has done anything wrong, then?"

"Such things cannot come of right, child."

"I don't know what to think. If I had not seen it, I would not believe it," said Annie.

"No, nor would I; but I have seen the same thing night after night since we came here when I looked out of the window—I always do so before going to bed. There was a figure I could have sworn to moving about the shrubbery, sometimes in white—but not like the drapery of the living—sometimes in grey, like smoke colour. Annie, I saw her in broad daylight, and so did Herbert, in the crowd in Lombard Street, the day we went to meet the shareholders. It was one sight of her passing us by, and then—a living person

might have been lost the same way, for it was busy—the crowd swept on, and we saw her no more. He tried to make me believe it was an unfortunate creature, called Susy Tramp, who used to be about this place, and hasn't been seen for years. But he didn't believe it himself, and I know the face was Harriet's, just as life-like as it appeared to you. Yet no living woman, Annie, could be seen at the times and places where she has been—in the rooms and passages of this house, when every door was locked, and everybody had been asleep for hours. Wasn't it a fearful sight of her Mrs. Leiton got? Poor Cross, the postman, met her on the Colchester Road, at the dead of night—she walked side by side with him for nearly a mile. He said that run as he might she kept up with him. The man has never been himself since; and Katy Coster's father—I think they call him Ned—carries the mail. He is a savage creature, and afraid of nothing; perhaps from downright bluntness of feeling, which qualifies him for his office of sexton. Yet I understand Coster has seen something too. In fact half the people about Castleford—and they the most sensible and intelligent part of the community—have got some glimpse or sight, like ourselves; and from the circumstances of Harriet's death—so mysterious, so inexplicable—I fear, oh! Annie, I fear there is some truth in the dark suspicion which people begin to whisper—that, as they say, the play was not fair, and the spirit cannot rest.”

“It's hard to think that Herbert could be guilty of the like, and strange if these old superstitions prove so true.”

“The older we grow, Annie, we are apt to learn the

real value of popular tradition as indistinct and fragmentary evidence of the unprovable truth which lies beyond our science and above our learning. Depend on it, whatever the world has said in its thousand languages and ever-changing creeds is verily true; and this returning of the dead is one of the whole world's beliefs, not to be reasoned away by the useful-knowledge men, nor preached out of mind by the theologians."

"But doesn't it seem absurd and foolish, when one thinks of it, that they should haunt rooms and houses, and frighten innocent people, for ends which might be far better served by appearing to a magistrate or a police inspector?"

"Annie, the laws of that after-life are unknown to us. Besides, remember there are many absurd and foolish people in this world, nay, many mischievous people, and they all die. Suppose such people carry their absurdity and their mischief with them—their spite, their wrongs, their causes of retaliation. And it is curious, Annie, that in all the legends on this subject we so rarely hear of any notable or capable person appearing after death. I know of no instance but that of Lorenzo de Medici, as reported by his secretary. The power of frightening people, and being much talked of, would be dear to many a living man and woman. It was to my niece, as far as I knew her. And, Annie, there is a consideration still more perplexing. You talk of folly and absurdity. Is there anything more absurd or unreasonable than that dread of the ghost—the *revenant*, as the French say—which every one of us knows to form part of our nature—whether the spirit, seen or imagined, has any cause of hostility to us or



not ? You never did Harriet Windham harm, neither did I ; and yet we tremble at the very thought of seeing her. Is it rational to fear so much that which we must become ? Is that after-life so hostile to this one ? There is no answer to these questions ; but neither philosophy nor religion has yet enabled men to shake off the fear. But to return to the case in which we are concerned. Annie, I have a presentiment that it will come to a public trial, perhaps an execution. There are strong circumstances against Herbert, and people are recollecting them now. I was speaking to Mrs. Mildmay at the post-office. She's a sensible, intelligent woman, the only one here with whom I could talk on such a subject. She told me about Cross and several others. There is no servant about the Hall who has not seen it except Katy ; and the general belief is that nothing earthly would get her to go anywhere alone after dark."

"Does Mrs. Mildmay know when it began ?" said Annie. Mr. Johnstone's discourses were flitting through her mind.

"About the end of last winter, she thinks it was. Charlie saw it first. He began talking about a woman who came at night. Sometimes the creature said it was his sister Susy, and sometimes the first Mrs. Herbert. Then the servants, one after another, got frightened and left ; and Miss Law said Charlie would stay no longer. What nerves of iron she must have to live in that far back cottage all alone. But I never knew a miser who was not similarly fortified. They fear nothing but the loss of money—which is not wanted by comers from the other world. Mrs. Mildmay also told

good deal of what was said about Leiton and Jessie. Poor Jessie—be what it will, I don't believe she had a guilty knowledge of the fact." Here they both started, for there was a tap at the door, and Jessie herself came in with Herbert Windham in her arms, to see Mrs. Berkley. "He is so good to-day," said the young mother, clasping up the peevish thing, already beginning to wail at the sight of the strangers, "I thought I should bring him just to let you see how well he looks." "Herbert, darling, you wouldn't cry sure?"—and she seated herself beside Mrs. Berkley, talking and pacifying by turns, while Annie, thinking of all that was hanging over and around her, could scarcely help saying, "Poor Jessie!"

## CHAPTER II.

## THE RECKONING TIME AND ITS INSTRUMENTS.

READER, has nature granted you perceptive power enough to note the mighty difference of those two kingdoms, between which most of us spend our uncertain existence—the realms of the eye and the ear? What conflicting evidence they offer regarding one's surroundings! What contrary testimonies they lift up concerning the state of things! You see a family all love and harmony. Get near enough to the maids that gossip over the garden wall, and you'll hear a different story. You see Courts exchanging hospitalities, perhaps celebrating weddings. Listen. The forging of sword-blades and the casting of cannon may be heard in the whispers that come down the back-stairs. But not to look so high as Courts and Cabinets—the opposition of the said two kingdoms was pretty well illustrated in the village of Castleford.

A stranger looking round on the thriving little place, and seeing its squire, Herbert Leiton, bowed down to by its shopkeepers—listened to by its householders—

attended in his progresses by parson, postmistress, and landlord of the "Windham Arms"—giving law to the neighbouring farmers, and rules of conduct to the cottagers—would have supposed he saw the most popular of squires and the most attached of tenantry. Yet, in the parlours behind the shops, and the tap-room of the "Windham Arms"—at the post-office window (no bad place for country gossip)—in the farm-house kitchens—and by the cottage firesides—the matter on which Herbert Leiton's old and young cousin held such grave discourse was the universal topic. The tale had many commentators, and many variations; but the substance of it was—that a murder had been committed, and that an unresting spirit haunted Castleford in consequence. The surface and the heart of society have different voices everywhere. Nobody in all the village admitted the latter belief in public. The Reverend Pilgrim lectured his school-boys, his clerk, and his humble parishioners on the sin and folly of such superstitions; but every soul of the lectured knew that his Reverence did not care for going out after nightfall. Miss Hamilton admonished the young ladies of her seminary against listening to such tales, and demonstrated out of the *Penny Magazine* that they arose entirely from ignorance and optic illusions; but the young ladies were perfectly aware that no consideration could make their respected schoolmistress go to the foot of Mill Street alone, except in broad day-light. Everybody was talking, and everybody was frightened in private. The mill-manager, indeed, having come from Scotland, knew nothing at all about the business, except when in communication with his foreman—also a native of Musselburgh. Mrs.

Mildmay kept her opinions for quiet discourse with Mary Collins. The landlord of the "Windham Arms" had a public confession, which he made in the tap-room, to the effect that Mr. Leiton was a highly respectable gentleman, and nobody should mind the nonsense of ignorant people; and a private, as well as different one, reserved for his colleagues and customers at the forge, in which a considerable quantity of his strongest beer was now consumed, to fortify the hearts of those whom business and gossip gathered there in the winter evenings.

Herbert Leiton had been all his life in the habit of making himself agreeable—shamming every thing that was requisite for his interest and comfort, and particularly careful of what people might say. He had been a good landlord to his tenants—a good and almost subservient neighbour to the surrounding squires. He had helped on and encouraged all the improvements of the place—he had oppressed nobody and benefited many—yet, that black report made him a branded man among gentry and peasants. The former, notwithstanding the terms of acquaintance and intimacy on which they stood with him, and which his second marriage seemed rather to confirm, despite the whispers that preceded it—had, one and all, drawn off from visiting his house, or accepting his invitations. The latter regarded him as a criminal, whom Providence would not suffer to escape, and had their treasury of country legends enriched at his expense.

The circumstantial evidence was strong against Leiton, and this return of the dead gave it a fearful confirmation to the popular mind. The apparition of

the first Mrs. Herbert was attested by people of all ranks. Late walkers had encountered her in roads and lanes. Late sitters had seen her pacing along the village street, in those most silent hours that come between midnight and morning. The ladies of Ashley Manor had been frightened almost out of their senses by seeing her looking at them through the back drawing-room window, as they sat round the fire in the winter twilight—by the way, they were the last of the county families who visited the Leitons. The visitation his mother had met with at the Hall got whispered about, in spite of the pains Herbert and his sisters took to keep strangers away from the old woman. It was also known that Mrs. Pilgrim had been pursued home from a tea-party, and never went out alone after. What the Squire or the present Mrs. Herbert had seen nobody could tell; but they always slept with light in the room, and never would move anywhere after dark, if they could help it.

The details of the nightly appearance varied considerably. Some had seen a figure in a long white garment—some a woman in ordinary and rather shabby clothes—but many had seen the face distinctly, and all agreed that it was the dead and buried Mrs. Herbert. On other particulars the witnesses were equally unanimous. First, it was allowed that the part of the Hall most haunted was the old wing at the back. Secondly, that the object of the visitation was Leiton's son and heir, whom the murdered woman was believed to hate as the son of her rival. The child had never thriven since the night she was seen by Betsy Collins shaking his cot as if to fling him out of it; and it was

understood that if her whole family's interest hadn't been at stake, Betsy would not have remained in the nursery. Thirdly, all who had seen the spectre concurred in declaring that the face showed no tokens of the mutilation which the corpse taken out of the Stour was known to have suffered ; and an explanation of the fact, which oozed out about this time, confirmed everybody in the belief that murder had been committed.

Between Castleford and Colchester there were continual goings. The kitchen and tap-room of the "Crown Inn," the quiet shops and back-parlours which had been filled with the gossip from Bury, the subsequent details of Mr. Leiton's loss and its speedy repair, were now as much occupied with the haunting of Castleford. In the town there were still fewer professed believers than in the village ; but a commercial traveller, whose business took him to the paper-mill, had seen something very unaccountable on the road when driving home to the "Crown" in his gig, between eleven and twelve. The appearance was understood to have been seen somewhere beside the old deserted mill. The traveller was a relation of Mr. Stoneman, the undertaker, who happened to meet with remarkable misfortunes that year. His three children—all the man had—took the scarlet fever, and died one after another. He was a Wesleyan preacher, as his cousin Mary Collins set forth ; and this desolation of his home woke up Mr. Stoneman's conscience to the part and lot he had in covering the foul play when he buried somebody else with all the honours due to Mrs. Herbert, and assured his satellites that "tin kettles would never be beaten at their doors for the mistakes of gentlefolks." The commercial tra-

veller's tale had probably something to do with Mr. Stoneman's conscientious difficulties. He revealed them to Wesleyan friends, by way of unburdening his mind. All who helped in the funeral arrangements, including Mary Collins, confirmed the evidence and spread the story. Those who talked of the troubled ghost knew that Mrs. Herbert did not lie in the vault of the Windhams, which accounted not only for the unmarred face, but also for the fact of her never being seen near the church or church-yard.

The Greenlanders have an idea that communication between the earth and the spirit-world is most practicable in mid-winter ; and as if to prove the universality of that northern notion, the greater part of ghost-stories, in all countries, are dated from the dead and dreary season of the year. It was so with the visitation of Castleford. The whisper about it had begun in the previous winter—nobody could exactly say when ; for it was faint and uncertain, and had commenced with Miss Law's attendant, poor half-witted Charlie. Her wrath at his raising such a story on her friends the Leitons was said to have frightened him as much as the spectre. He retired to the workhouse ; but soon after servant after servant left the Hall, and Mary Collins' son, when coming home from a night-preaching of the Wesleyans, saw something at the park-gate which kept him from attending sermons except in broad daylight. During the summer little more was heard of it, and sensible people began to laugh at the story ; but as the days grew short and dim it revived in full force. The appearances became so frequent, and the witnesses so numerous, that the whole neighbourhood was con-



vinced of its truth. The long evenings of Leiton's dread were favourable to the circulation, as well as the occurrence, of such tales ; and their fascination has been always equal to their terror for mankind. Far and wide through the towns and villages of Essex, the apparition and its accredited cause formed the private topic, whatever the public one might be ; and nothing else was talked of in those three resorts of Castleford lounging and gossip—the “Windham Arms,” the forge, and Molly Spence's shop.

With the two former the reader has been long acquainted, but the latter was an establishment of more recent origin, and had also a kind of spiritual back-ground. The religious institutions of the village had increased with its inhabitants. The new settlers brought their different creeds with them. The Reverend Pilgrim's church, though never filled under his ministration, could not accommodate their conflicting ideas of divine service. The mill-manager, being a Hamilton of Musselburgh, and a staunch Presbyterian, read long Scotch sermons in his own house on Sundays ; but the draper, the grocer, and some other respectabilities, who happened to be Dissenters, coalesced with certain farmers of the Wesleyan connexion, and, by their united efforts, the old deserted mill was obtained from the good-natured Squire—not then a haunted man—and its most available portion converted into a meeting-house, to which notable preachers were occasionally sent by the Conference, in hopes of getting up a revival ; but the chaplain in ordinary was the undertaker Stoneman, who came from Colchester to officiate every Sunday morning, though he could never be persuaded to hold

an evening service in the mill. A still humbler section of the community—stray Irish, who had gathered to work at the paper-mill, or labour on the neighbouring farms—belonged, as a matter of course, to the Scarlet Lady; and a certain Father Murphy, who presided over a chapel at Waltham, was commissioned to look after their souls. As they had no place of worship within six miles, he provided for their spiritual welfare by renting a cottage in Mill Street. Leiton got some blame from his ultra-Protestant tenants for letting it. But the largest and best apartment of it was duly consecrated, furnished with a miniature altar and other requisites for the Reverend Murphy to say Mass when his duties at Waltham permitted; and in the inferior end Molly Spence was permitted to establish herself and business, appointed custodian of the chapel, and guardian of the Catholic interest in Castleford.

Molly was singularly qualified for her official trust. She was a tall, thin woman, of more than middle age, who must have been handsome in her youth, for her features were finely moulded; her dark-blue eyes still clear and expressive; and the little of her hair that had not turned grey was black and lustrous. But Molly's look was at once sad and haggard; her unvarying dress was a rusty black gown, and a linen cap, of that make assigned for the last head-dress; and though always civil and willing to talk on grave subjects, the best of her customers never got a smile from Molly. Her accent proclaimed her to be a native of the Emerald Isle; she was the mother of two married sons, who worked at the paper-mill and had their cottages near it. The entire family had come from Lancashire—they were

all steady and respectable in their station—yet report said there were stains of no ordinary blackness on the mother's private history. Nobody could verify the tale, nor say how it had come to Castleford, except through the Costers; but it was to the effect that Molly had been the wife of a poor but honest man in Liverpool, and had deserted her husband's hearth and home for the house of a Jew pawnbroker, unscrupulous, old, and rich. He was a widower, too, and she lived with him some years in great ascendancy, and to the despite of his two sons, but was eventually driven out in disgrace—it was alleged, for some design she had meditated against the Jew or his property. After that, Molly led an evil and unlucky life for a considerable time; but in her latter days she reformed, so far as to become a penitential devotee, making up for past licences by the most austere observances of her church, and unbounded zeal for its increase in that Protestant neighbourhood. Molly was said to fast two days in every week, to keep Black Lent, and to walk barefooted occasionally to Father Murphy's chapel in Waltham; but her shop was one of the most useful establishments in Castleford. It was in the fancy Chandler line—all the requisites of civilised life, from dip candles and tobacco, up to Catholic manuals and rosaries, could be found there—moreover, Molly's shop was the best place in all the village for hearing of its unearthly visitant—the subject was after her own heart—it tallied with her penitential turn of mind, and was calculated, in Molly's opinion, to admonish her Protestant neighbours. With them Molly lived in great cordiality. Though sober and serious, she was neither sour nor disobliging.

Though zealous for the Catholic faith, she was not uncharitable, for her often-expressed conviction was that not only Castleford, but all England, would be shortly brought within the pale of the church. By way of doing her part in furthering that extensive reclamation, perhaps also to help business, and enliven her solitude in the midst of fasts and Lent-keeping, Molly held a species of *soirée* in her shop every evening till nine o'clock, when she closed for the night. It was attended by all her humbler neighbours who could find any excuse, or had company to go home with, particularly the feminine part of the community, for whom the tap-room and the forge would not have been considered proper resorts. Duly as twilight fell, and the working hours of the short winter-day were done, they came dropping in, farthing candles and ha'porths of pins furnishing their apologies; and round the little counter at which Molly sat knitting, for her shop and parlour were one, they stood resting their elbows on the uncovered plank, and discussing the news of the day, which was always freshest at Molly's counter, and the latest tale of terror concerning the Hall and its unbidden guest. The company generally consisted of the wives of respectable mill-workers, discreet servant-maids, who could stay so long out; but latterly had got a remarkable addition in the shape of Katy Coster, and, strange to say—her father.

Katy had been a shining light of Protestant piety in the eyes of the Reverend Frowd and the first Mrs. Herbert; but Katy's early teachings had been of mass and confession; her mother belonged to what Molly called the true old church, and now that she, in common

with the rest of Castleford, had spiritual terrors to contend with, Katy seemed willing to return into its sheltering bosom, and Molly Spence felt bound to work out her conversion. The Costers and she had been acquainted in times whose history was unknown to their present neighbourhood. Through them part of Molly's story had oozed out, when she first made her appearance in the village; but latterly Katy, and more particularly her father, had set themselves to wash out the reports they had raised, and denied all knowledge of anything to Molly's disadvantage. That was not the most surprising change which had passed on the Costers. Ned, the father, had been noted among his companions in forge and tap-room for what in his case appeared to be natural infidelity. Ned Coster's education extended to the use of the spade and the cart-whip; his inquiries were limited to where the best beer and the cheapest tobacco might be had, yet no philosopher could be more independent of creed or legend. It was true that he dug the graves and pulled the bell of the village church, comported himself with a sort of clownish decency in the presence of the Reverend Pilgrim and the ruling Squire, but with his associates in the above-mentioned haunts, Ned had been accustomed to declare his utter unbelief in the future life, and all that concerned it.

"Doesn't I see the skulls and the bones lyin' yonder in the churchyard?" he would say; "what difference is there, I should like to know, between them and the bones of cows and horses? We all goes to clay, and that's the end of us; the rest is all parson's talk—it keeps them in good houses and pay, you see. If I had

got the chance of being a parson myself, I should have read, and preached, and frightened you all too."

No arguments of reason or revelation could move Ned from that conclusion. He was one of those fag-ends of humanity in whose formation the spiritual element seems to have been left out. Destitute of feeling, imagination, and intellectual perception, beyond the common degree, he comprehended his material wants, and followed his material instincts, as did his brethren of the hair and tail; but beyond that earthly range, Ned felt no need, experienced no impulse, and had neither hope nor fear. He lived on the very bounds of the churchyard, all alone. He dug the graves as readily after as before dark. When the talk of Mrs. Herbert's apparition began, Ned heard it with blunt, ill-natured sneers; for in common with all such hard and deficient characters, he had a clownish self-conceit which delighted in taking its neighbours down. "In course it was a ghost, and nobody with a white sheet about them, or a false face, made on purpose to frighten the Squire; but if I was as him, I would take no trouble about Mrs. Herbert, she's safe in the vault yonder—ghosts, indeed, all hold women's talk, with the parson's helpin' them," and Ned drained off his pot of strong beer to that sentiment.

He had been swaggering for some time in this fashion—it made him noticeable and important by the forge fire and the tap-room counter; he occasionally attempted it, but in a mild form, in Molly Spence's shop, which he frequented, ostensibly to buy tobacco, but chiefly to secure the chapel-keeper's good offices with Katy, from whom contributions could not be

levied by other means. Ned was standing there one evening, in the fine frosty weather, when Leiton was showing his visitors the improvements of the place. The day had not quite fallen, and as the Squire and his lady, with Mrs. Berkley and Annie Hope, stopped on their homeward way to take a view of Molly's premises, and buy some trifles they wanted, a woman, dressed in garments not unlike a great-coat and hat, short, solid, and brown with wind and weather, but good-humoured and intelligent-looking, carrying a large, covered basket, and followed by a great, shaggy dog, paused at the narrow door-way as if about to enter, but respectfully waiting for the egress of the gentry. When they had purchased the best of Molly's needles and pins, and been curtsied out as befitted people from the Hall, Ned Coster returned to the stand he had left to make room for his betters, and the woman with the dog and the basket stepped in with, "Good evening, Mrs. Spence, I hope I see you well, ma'am."

"Quite well, thank you, Ann, and thank God too," said Molly; "how do you do yourself—won't you come behind the counter, and take a chair?"

"I will, with many thanks, ma'am; this basket of mine grows rather heavy as one grows old—perhaps you want something out of it, ma'am; I have got the shading combs you asked for last time, cotton balls of all colours, some fine Windsor soap and pomatum, the Squire's lady might want."

"Well, Ann, we'll see about it to-morrow, nothing like daylight for choosing things, when one's eyes begin to get a little misty with age, as mine are getting."

"Oh! dear me, Mrs. Spence, you mustn't begin to talk of age yet."

Molly did not smile, it was not her custom; but the devout and penitential woman looked pleased under that coffin cap of hers. The new comer's basket was deposited on her shop floor, the great shaggy dog lay down beside it, Molly stirred up the fire—for she had one behind the counter, and generally cooked her meals at it—and they entered on the state of business, the prices of bread, meat, and coals; the births, marriages, and deaths of note in the neighbourhood; and, lastly, the present condition of things at the Hall. Nothing remarkable had transpired for some days, as Mrs. Spence expressed it—nobody had seen anything worse than themselves. She and the traveller moralized a little, and shook their heads with forebodings of what would come out some day. The usual audience had not yet gathered in, but Ned kept his station at the counter, twisting round in his fingers a pennyworth of tobacco, which formed that evening's apology—it was thought, from the manner of the shop-keeper, that Coster had special need of one—and preparing to say something demonstrative of his contempt for the women's fears.

"That was the Squire and his lady who passed me at the door," said the traveller; "and the last lady's aunt, Mrs. Berkley—how old she is looking; but the young lady I never saw before—has Mrs. Berkley a daughter?"

"Oh! dear, no," said Molly; "that is Miss Hope, from London, she's a daughter of the handsome dark gentleman Mr. Leiton calls his cousin, though some



people says he is not, and don't look like the Squire at all. I never saw him myself; he hasn't been here since the second lady was brought home—isn't it a wonder he allows his daughter to come there?—but maybe they know nothing of it in London."

The traveller had been looking down on her dog and basket, but it was with the recollection of something she did not intend to speak of, and now raised her eyes, and replied to Molly's last observation, "I don't think it will appear to her—she's young and innocent; there's good-nature and good fortune written in her face, or I'm much mistaken."

"Them as tells fortunes is put in the stocks sometimes," said Coster, taking a bite off his tobacco.

The stranger had seen, but never looked at, never addressed a word to him; but whilst Molly was preparing a remonstrance against his uncivil interruption, she turned her keen clear eyes upon him; they were brown as her complexion, could express whatever their owner chose, and now spoke of knowing something not to Coster's advantage, as she said—

"I know they are, and some of them well deserve it; but as I am not afraid of being put in the stocks, I'll tell you your fortune without charge or ceremony; and that is, that you'll be hanged some day."

"I'm much obliged to you, I'm sure," stammered the sexton; "but I don't know what you mean," and he tried to look angry.

"Never mind what I mean — there's your fortune told to you;" and, turning to Molly, the stranger continued, without taking the smallest notice of his shuffling about, twisting up the tobacco, and grumbling

that some folk ought to keep civil tongues, "I forgot to ask you, Mrs. Spence, if your room upstairs was vacant, and if you could let me and Trotter stay for the night?"

"In a thousand welcomes, Ann, the room's at your service. I never take in anybody but yourself. It don't do for a lone woman in the shopkeeping line."

"This 'baccy of yours is very bad," said Coster, as two neighbour women came in, and Molly lighted the one candle which illuminated her establishment for evening customers; "it ain't the thing at all."

"Very well, Mr. Coster, you may get better elsewhere," said the independent woman of business; and he stamped out, muttering it was too hard a man couldn't get the worth of his money from an old friend. Grumbling was too common a business with Coster to excite any remark. The two women merely thought he was at it again, got each quarter of a pound of cheese, and had their gossip over the counter. The traveller laid aside her coat and hat, performed Molly's part in the conversation, and served the other customers who happened to come in, while she got ready supper in the adjoining kitchen, and looked out when appealed to on the subject of prices.

That was nothing strange in the experience of Molly's clients or patrons. The woman was known to the whole village by sight, by name, and by character, as she was to all the little old-fashioned towns and out-of-the-way hamlets in the eastern counties. Clad in her short pelisse of rough grey cloth, her felt hat tied down in stormy weather with a respectable black silk handkerchief, carrying her capacious basket, and followed

by her faithful dog, the short, substantial, active dame had traversed their by-ways in all seasons, and it was said at all hours, for many a year, supplying the humbler shops and secluded farmhouses with a variety of small wares purchased in London, and retailed at prices lower than they could be bought for in the county towns. Moreover, the hawkeress—people ought to get their proper titles—carried a stock of miscellaneous articles enough to suit many necessities. Beauty-improving paints and celebrated pills, cap-ribbons, playing cards, and catechisms, could be found among it; and to her recognized calling she added the occult profession of fortune-telling—with this difference, that whereas anybody was welcome to buy out of her basket, none but select and familiar friends were allowed the benefit of her prophetic powers.

It was chronicled of her that she was never known to tell an untruth in either business. The winds of heaven had blown upon her in all their moods, but never the breath of scandal. Those who knew her best would have left uncounted gold in her care, and intrusted any secret to her keeping. Her surname was Owens. She was the daughter of a small farmer in North Wales, had taken to that wandering life by choice and from her youth. The eastern counties of England were the latter scene of her travels. She had previously explored the north-west country, and made Liverpool her emporium; but in all her circuits the woman was known, as Susan Griffith knew her, when “she consulted the planets, the stars, and the surlestial signs,” in behalf of her young mistress, by the title of Flintshire Ann.

Molly and Ann had been acquainted in Liverpool. The Costers, in their early revealings, mentioned that the latter had been in the habit of buying goods from the Jew pawnbroker, and also that she had foretold to Molly, what might have been guessed without consultation of the stars, that they would part company on no friendly terms. Different as their doings were, the acquaintance had continued and grown more intimate after Mrs. Spence returned to honest ways, and got established in propriety and business. Molly was a devout Catholic—Ann belonged to the Primitive or Calvinistic Methodists; yet, either in hope of her conversion, or because her goods were cheap and suitable, Molly held fast by Ann's friendship, took large supplies out of her basket, and made her welcome as part guest, part lodger.

The cottage had two attic rooms, one over the chapel, which served as a confessional. Molly kept its key religiously, and said her prayers while dusting it. The other was a bedroom, but never occupied. Being a lone woman in the shopkeeping line, Molly preferred reposing in her kitchen, by way of keeping guard over the premises; and, on the same prudent principle, the attic was reserved, like Elisha's chamber, for Flintshire Ann and her dog Trotter, when their rounds brought them to Castleford.

Everybody in the village knew Ann, and Ann knew everybody, so she was qualified to help her hostess by serving the customers and taking part in the gossip. Neither was abundant that evening. Ann sold three farthing candles and a ha'porth of pins; and the only news to be heard and wondered at was that Neil Car-

lan, who had continued on the staff of the "Crown Inn" ever since he conducted the Bury correspondence, had left his place, and come dressed like a gentleman to visit his brother Dennis, who was now a journeyman in the forge, and the happy proprietor of a cottage, a wife, and two children.

Neil's advent was a subject of much speculation, and some controversy, in the village. People were not quite certain whether he had found somebody's pocket-book, forgotten at the "Crown," or that his uncle in America had died, and left him a legacy. Both tales had been heard from himself by different reporters, and Neil had a third which he imparted to his brother's select circle by the forge fire, to the effect "that a gentleman—an arl or a markiss"—Neil didn't know which—"but he had the best of everything at the 'Crown,' and never laid down nothing but gould—had tuck a fancy to him, said he was far too dacent a boy to be curryin' horses, and was going to take him for his body-sarvant." At another time Molly Spence would have taken as deep an interest in Neil's coming, and its attendant mystery, as anybody in Castleford. The Carlans were Irish, professors of the true faith; and Dennis and his family regular attendants at the chapel, whose sanctity she guarded and kept shop besides; but when Molly came out of the kitchen with the announcement that the supper was ready, she had on what the neighbours knew to be the shutting-up look, and proceeded to assure them it was late—that there was no use in burning a candle for all the custom she had that evening—and the times were too hard for a poor lone woman like her to waste anything. Thus admonished, the two women

removed their elbows and their cheese from the counter and went their way, making no friendly remarks on Molly—how high and mighty she was growing, with having the business of Castleford all to herself; how short she had been with Ned Coster, but they knew the reason—the Squire and all his ladies had been in her shop that evening; she had no welcome for poor folks after serving the gentry—but the next quarter of cheese they wanted they would go to Colchester for it, to teach Molly for her pride.

The aggrieved gossips had not seen the look of troubled thought with which Mrs. Spence went about her hospitable preparations in the retirement of the kitchen—how she stood muttering over the simmering pan with hands clasped, and head bowed down with some fearful memory. “Be hanged yet,” she said, and Coster knew the meaning of it; “Holy Mary! is he guilty?” and Molly crossed herself devoutly, and gave the pan a stir. Perhaps her guest did not remark that Mrs. Spence had anything more than usual on her mind—Molly’s look was always grave, and her talk serious. But when the customers were gone, the shop shut up, and they seated at table in the clean little kitchen, where the fire blazed bright and high, and Flintshire Ann did such justice—as the keen wintry air, and some ten miles of an Essex road, might enable one to do—to a plate of eggs and bacon, while Trotter rejoiced in all his mistress could spare, besides the refuse, and their hostess, with whom it was a meagre day, sat opposite slowly consuming a hunch of bread and a mug of water, Molly discoursed about the weather, the hardness of the times, the sickness that was abroad, the trouble she

had to please everybody, and then, looking at the mug, continued, "Did you hear that man Coster—what complaints he had about my 'baccy? It's not easy pleasin' him, Ann, I can tell you; and he always makes-believe that him and me was such old friends. I did know somethin' of him, I don't deny it, when he used to fetch and carry things about the Jew's house," and Molly paused, to murmur a penitential prayer—it was the poor woman's custom at any mention of her Liverpool friend; "I daresay you remember him, too," she said, returning from this devout exercise.

"Yes; he was just as cross and lazy then as he is now," said Flintshire Ann. "Never mind what complaints he has about 'baccy, or anything else—Ned Coster always grumbled, and always will."

"You put him down completely, Ann, about the fortune-tellin'." Molly was looking at the mug still; but her thin colourless face was anxious and eager. "I wonder he wasn't ragin' mad, instead of takin' it so quietly. In the name of goodness, what put it in your head at all to say he would be hanged yet?"

"I thought he looked like a man who might deserve it, and that was the readiest way to silence him. You see he didn't stay in the shop long after. Here, Trotter," and the consulter of the stars threw her dog a bone as carelessly and as much at her ease as if she had not been reading the face of her hostess behind the pewter mug, and speculating on Molly's anxiety concerning Coster's fortune.

"What makes you think he might deserve it, Ann?" Molly did not try to look at her guest, but the guest looked at her.

“Because he looks like it—because he’s an ill-starred, ill-conditioned man; and those that have least to do with him will come best off.”

There was silence in the little kitchen for two or three minutes. Molly sat as if she wished to say something more—to ask another question, but could not gather courage enough. Ann finished her supper, and with a remark on the excellence of the bacon which formed part of Molly’s miscellaneous stock, turned the conversation into an easier channel, assisted her hostess to put things in order for the night, washed first her own and then Trotter’s feet, and adjourned with her faithful companion to the attic; while Mrs. Spence saw that all was safe, said her prayers—they were an extra number that night—and lay down on the hard, blanketless bed where she did penance even in sleep.



## CHAPTER III.

## INTERESTED ENEMIES.

EXCEPT the three who chanced to meet in Molly Spence's shop that winter evening, before the customers came in, and the candle was lighted, nobody was aware of the unenviable elevation predicted for Ned Coster. But when the prophetess had supplied the demands of Molly's establishment, called at the surrounding farm-houses, and inquired if anything in her line was wanted at the neighbouring halls and manors—when she and Trotter had gone forth to finish their rounds in Essex and Middlesex—the frequenters of the forge and the tap-room, and, through their report, the entire village were edified with the news of Coster's conversion to the common faith and fear of Castleford. It was generally believed that the sexton must have seen something, for he was an altered man—not in the matters of laziness and beer-drinking—Coster still lounged in the best corner he could get—emptied as many pots as he could pay or obtain credit for—but, regarding Castleford Hall and its nightly visitor, his tune was

entirely changed. There was nobody in all the village so unwilling to pass the park gate, the river side, the old mill—in short, any of the proscribed spots—without company. The ingenuity of his neighbours failed to extract from Ned the story of his conversion; but he gave them to understand that “seein’ was believin’, that murder would out, and that for all the grand funeral they had seen, somethin’ would be found buried in the river banks—maybe in Kit’s Cove—as would shew what the Squire had been about in that long walk he took before the party.” The whispers and surmises to which these half disclosures gave rise spread far and wide. The converted sexton, it was evident, could tell a tale. His importance, in consequence, rose higher than ever it had been in his days of unbelief. Everybody was in hopes of getting the story privately out of Ned. To many a pot of beer was he treated in the “Windham Arms”—to many a luncheon of bread and cheese at farm-house firesides—and to many a lengthy gossip in Molly Spence’s shop. Having received a warning of some kind from the spirit-world, Coster was regarded by the devout shop and chapel-keeper as a probable subject of conversion to the true and ancient faith. Indeed, the sexton had given hints that his convictions tended that way, and intimated that the communications he had received from the other side of the grave by no means tended to the support of Protestantism. Molly’s hopes of his spiritual state were still more confirmed by the better understanding which, from this time, appeared to exist between him and his daughter Katy; and also by the friendship which suddenly sprung up between the Costers and the Carlans.

Neil, whose arrival and appointments had created so much surprise and speculation, remained at his brother's cottage, where, according to report, the best of everything was now to be had; and Dennis's familiar friends were entertained with occasional quarterns of gin through his liberality in the forge. Moreover, Neil and his relatives had finally settled on the tale of the gentleman who "tuck a fancy to him," by way of explanation of the funds and the leisure. "The 'arl or markiss, maybe" was evidently in no haste for his "body-servant." Neil stayed at the cottage—lounged in the forge—swaggered in the tap-room—played the successful man among all the neighbours of his own station—told tales of his exploits and adventures at the "Crown"—and, after the fashion of successful men in all ranks, flirted a good deal, and was laid snares for by mothers and daughters. But, to the envy and disappointment of sundry servant-maids and mill-girls, it was discovered that the most private and choice of Neil's attentions were being paid to Katy Coster. For her he waited at the dreaded park gate when the winter night was falling, that Katy might have a safe escort to unburden her mind in Molly Spence's shop, where she and her father generally met; and Molly had some private discourse with them on spiritual affairs by her kitchen fire, when the public gossip was over, and the shop shut up. With her he and his brother Dennis walked home to the Hall door, at the risk of returning by themselves, hours after dark; and with Katy's father Neil was known to be hand-and-glove. The neighbours believed Coster had confided to him his revelation from the spirit-land; but to the few who ventured to ques-

tion so great a man on the subject, Neil merely remarked "that some things shouldn't be tould to every parson—that innocent blood cried to heaven for vengeance—and people's high heads wouldn't save them from judgment." Katy was mighty in the same strain to her familiars; but with it there was mingled a talk of going to London, and being set up in a house of her own. Katy also sported a flashing brooch and a comb, too brilliant to wear in the presence of her mistress—the second Mrs. Herbert did not choose to see servants dressing above their station. Katy had got more than one rebuke for trespasses of the kind; but she took it out in reflections on the past conduct and future prospects of the Squire and lady—and triumphed in the conquest of Neil Carlan. A triumph, even in Roman times, was apt to bring forth sneers, and Katy's exaltation, being rather intrusive, got a sort of private reward from Dennis Carlan, who assured his confidential friends that Neil had no notion of the girl, "but was only carryin' Katy on for his fun—as the Squire and many a one else had done before him." To be carried on was Katy's portion, and many a woman of like character inherits the same—always serving some man's end or interest, and always believing herself the empress of his heart.

In the meantime her return to Catholicism was so rapid as almost to exceed Molly's devout expectations. She had got the length of attending mass now (when it happened to be celebrated in the miniature chapel), but under the protection of the Carlans, and with great secrecy, for fear of what Katy called "parsecution," otherwise being laughed at by the neighbours, who yet

remembered her performances in the Reverend Frowd's time. Katy's father was also in course of reclamation—and the honour of bringing that stray (but not very innocent) sheep into the true fold seemed destined for Molly Spence. From her earliest establishment in Castleford she had exerted herself to keep the sexton at a distance. The task was not an easy one—for, besides being unburdened with diffidence, Ned Coster had "a past at his back." Nevertheless, the spirited Irish-woman in some measure succeeded. But under the influence of that pious mirage what hours was the lazy, sottish clown allowed to lounge away in the least draughty side of her shop, and the warmest corner of her kitchen—what a score for snuff and tobacco was he permitted to run up—how much of his ill-natured conceit and stupid grumbling was listened to—how many sixpences did he borrow and forget to repay! Molly had already got him through purgatory, over the intercession of saints, and up to the worship of the Virgin, without any assistance from Father Murphy—whose duties among a poor and widely-scattered flock left him less time (perhaps less zeal) for proselytizing—and a dream of seeing Katy renounce her errors, and the sexton baptized in the chapel (of which she had the guardianship) began to gild Molly's penitential days.

Ned Coster had his dreams too; but they did not terminate with recantation and baptisms. He had been observed to take considerable surveys of Molly's stock, and notes of the customers who came and went, in his loungings on the premises. He had frequently congratulated her on her meagre habits of dress and diet; and declared his opinion that Molly Spence would be the cheapest

woman to keep in the whole parish. As Ned now carried the night mail from Castleford to Colchester instead of old Cross—who had made up his mind to retire from business, by way of avoiding ghostly company—as he was in such disfavour with Mrs. Mildmay that his remarkable conversion failed to procure him admittance within her door—and as he required special encouragement before taking the haunted road, it became his custom to wait for the making up of the letter-bag in Molly Spence's shop when all the rest of her gossips were gone, the window shut, and the door only remaining to be fastened. Molly did a good deal of the converting work in those quiet hours. But one night between nine and ten, as Ned sat screening the embers of her shop fire completely from the view of his hostess, and she had given him the customary exhortation to take on with the true religion, get the priest's blessing, "and be afeard of nothin'," the sexton looked up with, "You're very lonesome here, Molly, and so am I, living yonder beside the churchyard. I have been a-thinkin' it wouldn't be a bad thing if you and me made out the notion we had once on a time in Liverpool, and becomed one? I won't say again' the priest marryin' us, nor the christenin' of myself, if he wants it done. I'll warrant that religion of yours is the right one."

"You villain!" cried Molly, darting to the further end of the shop, and seizing the candlestick, "is that what you're after?" but the look of cool clownish surprise with which Ned regarded her brought the woman to a sudden subsidence. She leant on the corner of her own counter, with a mingled expression of fear and dis-

gust in the face half-covered with her hands. "What in the name of goodness put in your head to come here talkin' about ghosts and religion all these evenin's, and thinkin' about marryin' for the sake of my shop? Ned Coster, what becomed of your first wife?"

"She died, in course," said Ned, getting up and shuffling about as he had done under Flintshire Ann's prophecy. "Everybody dies, and why shouldn't she, I wonder? You're takin' on greatly this evenin', Mrs. Spence. I can tell you it ain't every honest man would be willin' to take a woman with such a crack in her character as you have got—not to speak of the trouble I got into in Liverpool, gettin' that arsenic for you when you wanted to settle the Jew."

Ned had got his courage talked up by this time, and stood within a few steps, looking at Molly with savage anger and defiance, while she cowered down and covered her face from his eyes.

"Thank God, I did not get that done," she said. "The old man's blood is not on my hands, though the wicked design was proved against me, and they would have brought me to the gallows but for fear I should tell about the stolen goods he took in, Ned." She spoke lower, and did not venture to look up. "There was a compact between you and me at that time. Holy Mary, have mercy on me for my share of it! You were to settle your wife if I settled the Jew—and you thought of marryin' me for the riches the old man had left me in his will. Now listen. All the time I was only playin' on you—first for fun, because I saw the conceit of you, and then to get the arsenic. God forgive me! I would as soon as thought of marryin' the cart-horse you

used to use so badly. And now I would rather jump into the Stour than let the like of you put a ring on my finger."

Molly's hands, descending from her face, seized the candlestick, and the woman raised herself (as she spoke) with a fierce, contemptuous air.

"Oh! you would," said Coster, shuffling once more, and trying to keep within civil bounds, while his eyes glared and his large mouth worked with suppressed passion. "Well, I'm not a bit carin'. A woman with a bad name ain't no credit to any man. I don't know how that story about the Jew and the arsenic would be thought on in Castleford if it was published."

"Publish it if you like, you villain!—and tell them, too, how you managed your own poor wife years after, when the business was over, and there was no temptation."

"Katy died, and her death was a great loss to me, on account of the 'nuity," said Ned, now shuffling to the door; for Molly was brandishing the candlestick.

"But you didn't think it would go with her. Ned Coster, I know you; and it's my wonder how you can sleep in your bed and such things goin' about Castleford, for fear of what might come to you. Go home and repent, but keep a still tongue in your head—Flintshire Ann's prophecy about the gallows and you might come to pass yet—and never let me know you to come here again with your vile deceit about my holy religion, and your sinful covetin' of my shop."

"I only comed for half an ounce of 'baccy; and I don't know what you mean, missis, with your airs and your holiness—they sit well on a street-walker; but I'll



go to Colchester for the next 'baccy I want, rather than come to such a madam, though I did take charity on you, so far as wantin' to make an honest woman of you."

"Go to Colchester or the —— for your 'baccy!" cried Mrs. Spence, the fire of her race overcoming the long subduement of meagre days and penitential nights; and Ned escaped her candlestick only by darting out of the door, against which it banged, and never slackening his pace till he reached the "Windham Arms."

In front of that friendly shelter the sexton paused, rubbed his shoulders as if they had received the destined blow, turned his head in the direction of Molly's shop, and discharged a muttered volley of names and titles much more expressive than select. Ned's suit had been rejected, and, clown as he was, the anger of the man rose up against the woman's scorn. There was something more than anger in Ned's mind, however.

"She can't know nothin' to tell," he grumbled; "but them women's always talkin'. I wish I hadn't axed her. But the shop's a good un. And she knows Flintshire Ann. If I could meet her on the road without that dog of hers, I'd know what she had to say. But it ain't nothin', only women's talk." And Ned gave himself a consolatory shake, as Neil Carlan emerged from the public-house, and saluted him with,

"Good evening, Mither Coster. You'll be late for the post-bag; but I have a word to say to you. The gentleman"—and Neil came closer—"I'll be glad to see you at the house in Caroline Street, as soon as you have delivered the bags; and, if you take a friend's advice,

you'll tell him all you know about the consalement in Kit's Cove, and do what he bids you ; for it won't be again' the law—attorneys never does that. And he's the boy won't stop for thrifles in the rewardin' line."

"I dunno like attorneys, nor law men of any sort," said Ned, growing suddenly dogged. "One of them desaved me once about Katy's 'nuity—indeed, I'm thinkin' it was that gent's father."

"Oh, yes, Ned ; but you know you axed him when he was comin' home from the dinner and had a drop too much, bekase you thought to get an advice gratuuous for nothin'. I've heard you a-tellin' the story a hundred times. But, Ned, you never tould me how you found out she was goin' to die."

"I found out nothin' about it. But everybody dies ; and I wanted to know if the 'nuity would be mine when she was off the walk. That lawyer said it would, and it wasn't, you see, and I dunno like lawyers. And I don't think I'll go to Caroline Street. Where's the use of a poor man goin' out of his way till he knows what he's to get by it ?"

"As you please, Ned, as you please," said Neil, who had taken the measure of his man over many a pot in forge and tap-room. "There might be ten pounds to be got—there might be twenty. People that does work should be able to make terms for it. Besides"—Neil was moving away, but his head was still turned to Coster—"when the Squire's done for, he'll be master, and more, in Castleford. But good night—do as you please." And the able envoy scampered away at a pace which Ned tried in vain to follow, and at length gave up with a curse ; for rapid motion did not suit Mr.

Coster. Moreover, he was at Mrs. Mildmay's door, and some minutes beyond his time.

The small house, with Mrs. Rothwell on its door-plate, stood where it did in Caroline Street, Colchester, when Henry Hope bought up the widow's claims to the warehouse now occupied by Couples and Co. But nothing in this world stands perfectly still—not even houses. They grow old and scuffy—particularly when built of cheap materials, and occupied by limited gentility. When, in the expressive language of its fair inhabitants, they brought their spirits down to live in that little place, it was new, neat, and trim; but the rain, smoke, and the passing seasons had told on it since, without and within. It wanted paint, it wanted paper, it wanted plaster; and the landlord was in no hurry to supply its wants, for one quarter's rent was never paid till two more were due. At present there were three quarters owing, and Mrs. Rothwell's house was decidedly the shabbiest in Caroline Street.

Increasing years and decreasing funds had told on its dwellers also. A bird's-eye view of the little drawing-room, to whose smoked ceiling and dilapidated paper the dimness of two consumptive candles lent a friendly shade, would have shown the beholder two tall women, thin, wrinkled, and grey-haired—the one sitting fast at crochet by the fire, the other moving about on domestic duty—and on a sofa in the end of the room something covered with a dirty shawl, which had once been Indian, and very like a bundle of clothes, if one had not seen the night-cap, with some rags of Valenciennes, and the face sharper, if possible, than it used to look in Portman Square. And these were all the wrecks that time and

fortune had left of Mrs. Rothwell, her daughters, and the position. Ay, the position—its ruined outlines were still traceable. Were not the two consumptive candles imitation wax?—were not the spoons which Augusta rubbed and set down with the cracked tea-cups still emblazoned with the Rothwell crest?—were not the two thin, wrinkled, grey-haired sisters shivering that winter night in low evening dresses of pink lena, which had done duty at the select parties in Portman Square?—and, to crown the resemblance of their past and present, was not their one servant-maid grumbling over short commons in the kitchen? And had not the grocer's boy just left a bill, with an intimation that his master would take proceedings if it wasn't paid? Use and wont had made the Misses Rothwell familiar with such every-day occurrences. Besides, a child might have understood that something of special interest was on the *tapis*—some important person expected. The only easy-chair the house contained, with a clean anti-macassar on, was set in the warmest corner. A pair of worked slippers stood airing at the fender hard by—they were meant for a man's feet; and ever as Miss Augusta rubbed the spoons bright, and selected the least cracked of the china out of the corner cupboard, she glanced first at the clock on the mantelpiece—by-the-bye, it never kept time—then at the door, and if but a step was heard approaching, her thin face puckered up in a sort of a fluster, whereat Miss Sophia frowned over her crochet, and said, with her envious sneer, "Oh, you needn't think it—he's not coming yet awhile."

The Misses Rothwell were spinsters who, in sailor phrase, seemed to have passed the Cape of Good Hope,

but at what period of a woman's life that promontory is lost sight of it were hard to say. Miss Augusta was waiting for somebody whom her sister did not expect with the same feelings; yet the man was an important, and, in some sense, a welcome guest to the whole family. The inhabitants of Caroline Street being too genteel to gossip except through their servants, and having little to do—for they were mostly retired or reduced people—watched each other well; so it became known to them that, for the last six months, no Wednesday evening had passed without bringing Mr. Sharp Keightley to the Rothwells' door about six o'clock, that he left at eleven precisely, that he had always tea and supper whose like was not met with in the house till his advent, and was paying attentions to Miss Augusta.

Mr. Sharp Keightley, whose appearance, manner, and antecedents were touched on at the time of his introduction to the Frazer family, while his brother Grandville yet flourished in Colchester, and the Barley-bruiser was their united theme, had been married in his day to the sickly sister of a wealthy farmer, then a bachelor, and one of Mr. Keightley's clients. The farmer was expected to remain single; the sister was expected to outlive him, and bring his farm, stock, and bank receipts all home to the attorney. But the sister died one year after her marriage, the farmer married his dairymaid and had now a thriving family, and Mr. Keightley had been ever since paying attentions, breaking or being broken off, in one quarter or another where any prospect of portion or expectations could be seen. But the attorney's heart and hand remained free, and

nobody could conjecture why he put them in peril by coming to the Rothwells every Wednesday evening. With all his love of grandeur and good cheer, what inducement had the money-making, money-spending attorney to frequent the house whose external condition and maids' report told of the most poverty-stricken gentility, and court the gaunt, grey, withered woman, clothed in faded lina, for his reception? Mr. Keightley was master in that house while he chose to remain; his humours, his whims, and his orders were attended to—and many a man frequents a house—yea, and carries on a courtship—for no greater cause; but Mr. Keightley could see farther into life's millstone.

The tale of the hidden crime and the haunting spirit had reached his ears, in common with all Colchester. The attorney was thought to believe it, too; for when business happened to take him to the neighbourhood of Castleford, he always took care not to be out after dark. What form of spiritual terror ever made men less eager after this world's goods? The bank property for which Herbert Leiton had made his alarming sacrifice glistened in the eyes of the hawk of Colchester. Should the demands of public justice remove Mr. Leiton out of the way, he had studied their uncle's will sufficiently to be aware that the whole would devolve, without condition or restriction, on the Misses Rothwell. Their mother, though yet among the living, was scarcely to be reckoned on as an heiress. The silk-mercener's widow still looked and spoke sharply, but with her the days had gone backward; the brain taxed with the maintenance of the position for so many years, and on such different stages, had struck work at last. It is

a strange privilege of the over-balanced mind to ignore time and change, and to stand fast at some chosen point, like a watch still marking the hour at which its mainspring was broken. Mrs. Rothwell had made a dead halt at the time when Harriet Windham was a boarder in her house in Portman Square — watched, found fault, and quarrelled with on account of Herbert Leiton. The old comings and goings, the espionage and the contentions, were going on still. She woke up at nights to admonish and debate with the woman for whom her friends had worn out their mourning long ago; and whatsoever went wrong about the house in Caroline Street she attributed to the machinations of Herbert Leiton. On both the losing and the winning matron in that fierce war of families, a mist of confusion had fallen from the same quarter; but the bank property remained sound and substantial, and to it Mr. Keightley gave his serious consideration. Mrs. Rothwell being so occupied—and, it was hoped, not long for this world—counted for nothing in its division. The whole would be shared between her daughters; and he who married the eldest, if a judicious man, might get the management of the younger sister and her portion.

Mr. Keightley had no doubt of Leiton's guilt. He was legally confidential with most of the county magistrates; had not he and his father before him done their attorney work, and become acquainted with their family difficulties? Mr. Keightley, therefore, knew their opinions on the subject; nothing but evidence was wanting to remove the only barrier between him and the bank property, for Miss Augusta's heart and

hand were to be had for the asking ; his opportunities, as one of the people of the position, enabled him to decide that question, and, to get up evidence, Mr. Keightley set himself with the ingenuity and determination of a lawyer pursuing his own game. He said, and perhaps half persuaded his own mind, that he had no interest in the matter, but to bring crime to condign punishment, and retrieve the rights of the widow and the fatherless. The Rothwells half-believed him—poor souls, their minds were never of the clearest, and had met with crosses enough to warp them. The position had been growing every year more difficult to maintain, even in Colchester. Old friends who stuck by them, and made up the revenue when they left Portman Square, had fallen away, or become unable to continue their contributions, through private misfortune. In fact, the Rothwell exchequer had now scarcely any supplies but what came from Mrs. Berkley and Herbert Leiton. The former prudent lady had found it expedient latterly to draw off from Caroline Street in person, if not in purse, for fear of increasing demands and interminable complaints of all their other friends and relations. Herbert Leiton's subscription was as large as ever, and given with good-will, in spite of the unrepaired breach between the families ; but the Rothwells, having nobody else on whom to cast the direct blame of their misfortunes, agreed that he was the sole cause of their family's ruin. Hadn't he wheedled poor Harriet into marrying him, to the serious injury of her nearest relations ? Hadn't he estranged her affections from them ? Hadn't he spent the money which should have been theirs, on his mother and sisters, and that



old house and property of his, which wasn't worth three farthings, till he spent poor Harriet's thousands on it? Their mother had made it out, long before her mind wandered back to the match-making time, that Herbert had been the cause of the silk-mercier's death. To that crime Augusta and Sophia added the shipwreck of her reason, the concealed murder of their cousin Harriet, and worse than all, the escaping from justice, and keeping them so long out of their undoubted right to the bank-property. Mr. Keightley was the man to rectify all that. He had undertaken their cause, he had commenced a dry courtship—the whole house and household were at his beck and bidding; and Mr. Keightley came there every Wednesday evening, to exercise his authority, and astonish the Rothwells with such fragments of his policy as he thought prudent to exhibit for their admiration.

It is not every man that has a place to be great in, but the little attorney had found one for himself, and Miss Augusta fluttered up, for the seventh time, as his well-known knock sounded at the door, while her sister laid aside the crochet, and made efforts to clothe her face with smiles—no easy task for a spinster, with the conviction that nobody was coming to her. The small limb of the law came in with an air of power and importance sufficient for taking his seat on the woolsack. "How do you do, Gus?—How do you do, Sophy?" he said, shaking each sister's hand with great impartiality, only "Gus" got the tightest squeeze. Then he permitted her to remove the warm cape and comforter with which his chest had been fortified against the night air, seated himself in the easy-chair, thrust his feet

into the slippers which she adjusted for their reception, cast a look of condescending approbation on her and the tea-table, and said, "Gus, is Sally gone to her aunt's yet?—you let her go every Wednesday evening, as I recommended, don't you?"

"Oh! yes; she's just going when the muffins are toasted."

"Send her off directly. I have particular business to speak of, and it don't do to have such girls about. Tell her not to come home sooner than eleven, stay downstairs till she has gone, then bring up the muffins with you, and I'll teach you to toast them, my dear," said the attorney, which proof of tender regard sent Miss Rothwell smiling out of the room to execute his orders concerning Sally, a poor, orphan girl, disqualified for better service by having one leg somewhat shorter than the other, and, therefore, willing to take the low wages and short commons allowed in their establishment. When she was gone, Miss Sophia stirred the fire, and remarked it was a cold night.

"Oh! yes, it is cold," said Mr. Keightley; "but I never mind the weather; in fact, my mind is too much occupied, not with your family business alone—though of course I regard it with profound interest—but my hands are so full of cases and clients—think of that, I may say, all-important case, about to come on at the Lent assizes, an action for defamation, two baronets and a peer's family to be brought into Court; damages laid at two thousand. That's something for a man to consider; I have the whole management of it. Then there is Grandville's patent for that new invention of his—a magnificent thing."

"Isn't it to make cheeses?" inquired Miss Sophia.

Mr. Keightley deigned merely to frown upon her, and addressed the remnant of his discourse to Miss Augusta, who had by this time returned with the muffins and toasting-fork. The interest and importance of the invention were explained and illustrated for her edification, with interludes of how to balance the fork and brown the muffin.

"You perceive Grandville is obliged to remain at Boulogne on account of certain family interests—we have peculiar expectations there; but I leave time to clear up such matters, whatever absurd reports may be circulated for the present. Well, as he cannot come in person to claim his own rights, certain people—I do not think it prudent to name them, but they are among the first-rate firms of London—have attempted to appropriate his invention—the product of his genius, you understand—the Barleybruiser, which will undoubtedly make our family's fortune; and the whole responsibility of preserving it from the grasp of covetous hands now devolves on me. Mrs. Grandville, poor woman, can render no assistance, and has retired to live with her uncle, Perkins—a very wrong-headed old man, who cannot understand my brother, nor allow for the peculiarities of our position—"hold the fork a little higher, my dear; I like my muffins crisp."

"What's that you're about, Miss Augusta?" screamed the bundle of clothes at the further end of the room, getting up on its elbow and pulling off the night-cap with the rags of Valenciennes, which it flung at the lady kneeling on the hearth-rug by Mr. Keightley's chair. "Is that the way for a lady to maintain her position,

crouching over a fire, and holding a toasting-fork?—Call the cook, call the housemaid, call the tiger, call my own maid; but don't sit on a hearth-rug toasting muffins—they never do that in the West End.”

“Couldn't you get that old woman to bed before I come?” said Mr. Keightley.

“Old woman, indeed!” cried the dame, who had seen her eighty-fourth birth-day; “I'm no old woman, I tell you—I'm a lady of position. Didn't Lady Georgiana come to my parties?—didn't Lady Cecilia bow to me in the park?—I think it was yesterday—didn't the Countess Dowager of Westbury Leigh send me her wedding cards when she married the half-pay captain? It's Herbert Leiton that puts all that in your head; he does nothing but malign me and my family. Harriet is out with him again, at this hour,” and she gazed round the room, and swept back the thin grey hair which straggled over her eyes. “It's not proper, I say—she has not been with us an evening this fortnight. Tell John not to open the door—no matter how she knocks—till I come down myself, and let her know how late it is.”

“Stop, mamma!” cried Sophia.

“Hush, mamma!” cried Augusta.

“No, I won't stop, and I won't hush. You're all helping Harriet to disobey her aunt; and you'll get the benefit of it some day—listen,” and the sharp voice sunk to a whisper; “she'll marry him yet, and he'll get all—all my brother's money, and my curse with it!”

“Good gracious, what shall we do?” said Miss Augusta, starting up in a temper she could not control, even before the attorney; but he said, “Mind the muffins,” rose grandly from his chair, took one of the

candles in his hand, so as to be more plainly seen, and marched straight to Mrs. Rothwell, who was now endeavouring to get up from the sofa.

"You perceive, ma'am, I am here to-night. I have come on your family business—expressly to counteract and overturn the designs of Herbert Leiton."

"Yes—yes, the villain." But the poor old lady spoke very low, and gathered herself into the farthest corner of the sofa, for Mr. Keightley's keen eyes had power to subdue her most demonstrative mood.

"But, Mrs. Rothwell, I must not be disturbed in my conversation with your daughters."

"Oh! no, of course not. There will be no disturbance at all when Harriet comes in. You'll talk to her aside, and put her quite against the match—you lawyers can do such things."

"Yes, Mrs. Rothwell, provided you make no noise, but have your tea quietly at the side-table. Sophy, come and put on your mamma's night-cap," and Mr. Keightley marched back to his chair, while Miss Sophia obeyed his command in a not very affectionate manner; and the poor old lady of the position sat still in the corner, rocking to and fro, and muttering to herself, "Yes—yes, he'll put her against the match."

A female train to admire, listen to him, and be governed by him—at least, ostensibly—is an acceptable appendage to many a man, particularly among the domestic nations. The harem of the East, and the peculiar institution of the Salt Lake, probably owe their existence as much to that fact as to man's erratic fancy or folly. The house in Caroline Street, in want of paint and plaster as it was, and blessed with neither good

looks, good sense, nor good cheer, was Mr. Keightley's harem, in the honest family sense of that old Arabian word. There he drilled the Misses Rothwell, managed their mamma, was head chief and dictator, with the conviction of Herbert Leiton for his aim, and the bank property of old Seldon for his object.

Miss Augusta and he had tea together in great state at the centre table. Miss Sophia officiated, with her mamma, at a side one. The conversation consisted of the propriety of getting the old lady to bed, and the two ladies' complaints of the trouble they had with her; whereon the attorney gave them a lecture on duty. He also found some fault with the muffins—expatiated on the action for defamation, and the prominent part he was obliged to take in it—gave his fair companion of the tea-table a full account of the other exploits he would perform at the Lent assizes; but it was not till the table had been cleared for hours, Mrs. Rothwell taken upstairs under his command, and Sophia left to keep guard till she slept, that from his place of power in the easy chair he deigned to enter on the particular business on account of which Sally had been sent to her aunt.

"Gus, as I believe you are discreet, I think it right to mention that things are now in a train of discovery."

"For goodness sake, Mr. Keightley, have you found out anything?"—and hope lighted up the poor, puckered face; for riches and the regained position lay behind the gallows which the attorney was so silently setting up for the Rothwells' enemy.

"Yes, Gus. I'm always finding out something; but it is not yet time to lift the veil. However, I may tell you that the person I deputed to gather information in

Castleford has been in some degree successful. A man will probably come here to-night, with whom I must have a private conference in the back-parlour. When he knocks, you will shew him in—then come and let me know. He knows something, but must be pumped, you understand—pumped and set to work, Gus; and I'm probably the only man in all Essex who could manage the fellow. He's a stiff subject—hard-headed and greedy, they tell me—by-the-bye, remember to see that there are no spoons or portable goods of any description lying about the back-parlour. I'll manage him, Gus—I'll pump him—I'll set him to work—these ignorant, covetous creatures are the very best tools an able man can employ."

Miss Rothwell knew her intended lord better than to ask any questions, though her mouth and eyes were widening with wonder at what he meant, when a single knock, very like the blow of a hammer on a rebellious nail, made Mr. Keightley start from his easy chair, exclaiming, but in a low tone—"There he is—now for management! Go down, Gus—shew him in, but don't forget to see about the spoons."

Gus went down with a candle in her hand—looked about the back-parlour, while two blows, each of increasing violence, were given to the door—saw that there was nothing for eyes to covet or hands to filch about the small room—and then admitted Ned Coster, the Castleford sexton and postman, who stamped in, after his usual manner, saying, he had "comed to see a gentleman."

"Step in there, and he'll be with you in a minute, and take a chair, if you please," said Miss Augusta

with civility (not always accorded to her humble neighbours), as she placed the candle on the table, closed the door, and flew up-stairs in the dark to tell Mr. Keightley.

"Let him wait for a few minutes," said the hawk of Colchester, sharpening its beak and claws in the easy chair—"those people would think themselves of consequence if they were not allowed to wait."

He took out his watch—held it in his hand for five minutes, during which the attorney looked attentively at it and the chimney-glass—Mr Keightley had large faith in the power of his own countenance. Augusta could hear her own heart beat, as well as the watch ticking; and Sophia stole down to know what it was all about. At the termination of the five minutes the attorney entered the back-parlour—looked at Ned Coster, where he sat planted in the centre, very superciliously, and inquired—"My good man, what is your business with me?"

"I—I thought you wanted to see me," said Ned, rather surprised—for he had come determined to take high ground.

"To see you?—who are you, pray?"

Mr Keightley had seated himself right opposite, and fixed his hawk's eyes on the interrogated.

"I'm Ned Coster, the sexton of Castleford. Didn't you send a message to me by Neil Carlan?"

"Oh, yes!—to be sure. I recollect Neil told me you knew something about that concealed murder—not likely to be concealed much longer, by the way. Well, now, what do you know about it?"

"I didn't say as I knowed anything"—Ned took to



the clown's natural resource in his confusion, and thrust his fingers deep into the thick, half grey crop that covered his large cranium ; but the attorney's eyes were upon him, and he had to proceed—"only I believes—that is, I thinks there's somebody's bones hid somewhereabouts Kitscove, where her bonnet was got."

"Are there indeed?" said Mr. Keightley, with great composure. "No going about the bush, Ned," he continued in a suddenly changed tone, as the sexton attempted to qualify his last words—"I know you have talked about these bones before, and if you don't look sharp you'll get into trouble about them—common folks have been hanged instead of gentlemen before now. Mr. Leiton has done the deed, we all know—and every right-minded person will wish to see justice done and crime punished—but the law cannot take its course without evidence—evidence, you perceive, is the thing wanted, and the man who can get up evidence will be rewarded."

Ned had been looking as if he wished himself anywhere but in the back-parlour, under that hawk's gaze, but now he appeared to see land.

"If bones isn't evidence I don't know what is—and they're bones there, I'm sure."

"I know there are—I know all about those bones, Ned"—the sexton started, and the attorney thought it was the effect of his eye, for it was more keenly fixed on him than ever—"but, Ned, the Squire would say he knew nothing about them—perhaps he could get the magistrates to believe you did. It don't do to talk about buried bones without saying who buried them, or how you found them out."

"I don't know—I found out nothin'—I only thinks it."

"Come, come, Ned—once for all, you know the bones are there. You believe, and so do I, that Mr. Leiton did the business. Now, if he could be got to shew an interest in them, you understand—a fear of them being found out—that would be evidence. I am interested in this case—every good man ought to be, as it concerns public justice—and I would not mind a few pounds out of my own pocket, neither would the Misses Rothwell, my respected clients, whom this wicked man is keeping out of their uncle's property. You are a sexton, Ned—you could just mention what you know to the Squire, and see if he would not allow you to remove the—the bones, in fact—to the churchyard in a private way, and let me know what he says. Murders have been discovered by quite as simple means—it would wash your hands of the matter—and I tell you, Ned, it is not safe to know so much about it."

"Oh! I knows nothin' at all. But if there was any-thing to pay a poor man's trouble I would soon make it out, and get the Squire to say somethin' too," said Ned, looking at once relieved and greedy.

"On the honour of a legal gentleman I promise you your trouble will be paid well and handsomely. In fact, I may as well mention that my friend the mayor—Mr. Russell, you know?—is quite as anxious as myself to bring the crime home to Leiton. He is the nephew of one of those great bank people in London, who have the care of what was Mrs. Herbert's fortune, and now belongs of right to her cousins the Rothwells. I heard him say the last time we dined together, quite alone

and confidential," said the little attorney, "that he would not think twice of handing a twenty-pound note to the man who could furnish anything like evidence. Now, Ned, you see what you may earn if you have only sense enough for yourself. But take care of talking, that always gets people into scrapes."

"No fears of me talkin' too much. I leaves that to the women. They can do plenty on't," said Ned, with a jocose swagger, which Mr. Keightley did not deign to notice, except by observing that he had no more to say, and would see him as soon as he made any discovery. Then the attorney took up the candle, marched Ned to the door, advised him not to lose a good chance for getting money—for everything now depended on himself—bolted it behind him, and walked up-stairs to a supper of stewed oysters, which his "respected clients" had by this time prepared.

How eagerly expectant of news the two in pink lena looked as he entered the room. The Misses Rothwell stood in too much dread of their legal adviser to attempt listening, but Mr. Keightley vouchsafed no report of proceedings in the back-parlour. He took his seat at the table and opened fire on the oysters, as if they had been the only business of the evening, pointing out sundry improvements to be made in future stews. He had taken upon himself to teach Augusta cookery as the art most requisite for her coming promotion, settled the conduct of their affairs for the ensuing week, and laid down rules for the management of mamma and Sally. To do the attorney justice, they were judicious ones, and when the sisters had fretted on their chairs, and talked of everything but what most

concerned them, the clock struck eleven, and he rose to go. Augusta, being *au fait* in her duties, brought the cape and comforter, while Sophia took leave, and left the lovers—not to exchange vows, but hold some private conversation in the passage.

“Do you think that man will be of any use? Does he know anything?” inquired the bride-elect with great humility.

“Leave that to me, Augusta. I have taken upon myself to bring long-concealed crime to justice, and redeem your family inheritance from the grasp of a blood-stained usurper, a task beyond the abilities of ten ordinary men—but I will do it. Good night, Augusta. I know you have sense to be guided by me in all things. Make haste and send that gown to Mary Collins, and a shawl to her daughter Betsy is also advisable. Those people are important witnesses, and ought to be secured in time. You know not how soon we may want them. As for Katy Coster, she would be too difficult for you. I have her, I may say, under cultivation by a very capable hand. But the gown and shawl should be sent to the Collins without loss of time.”

“We would do it if we could, Mr. Keightley. We would do anything you advised, of course. But that Smith, the draper, won’t give us a yard till his last bill is paid. We haven’t a farthing. The last quarter’s money had to go for taxes—the most part of it—and the butcher was so impudent that we had to give him the rest.”

“Are there none of your old gowns or shawls that would do? Something fine or spicy, you know, always goes down with those sort of people. Never mind their

being a little worn. Just send them quietly as a little acknowledgment. You might insinuate they were the only people about the Hall you had the slightest respect for, on account of their good behaviour to poor Harriet."

"Well, my blue satin is not very old," said Augusta, with a sigh; "and mamma's peach-coloured shawl—she don't much want it now—if it could be got away without her knowing?"

"Get it, and send it and the gown without loss of time. I depend on your sense to manage that matter. Good night, my dear." The bony fingers got another tight squeeze. The hawk tightened his comforter with his other hand and was gone, leaving Miss Rothwell to lock up the door for the night. But despite the doom of the blue satin, she did so with a smiling countenance; and if that "Good night, my dear" did not bring her rosy dreams it sent her in good spirits to bed.

Nature has graciously provided that some women should be easily satisfied in the article of attachment, and it was well that at least one of those unlucky sisters had some bank of consolation to draw upon. No wonder they grew grey and wrinkled with that long serving and waiting for Herbert Leiton's execution, with their mother in her strange dotage always raking up the past in that latter-day scarcity of funds and friends. Moreover they served and waited almost in the dark. The hawk of Colchester would have kept any client so as far as he could. It was his favourite policy, and with the Misses Rothwell certainly the most advisable course. Beyond the business of the position to which they had been brought up the ladies were qualified for nothing. They could give the attorney no assist-

ance in his searchings and soundings. He knew that anything intrusted to them would be very likely to get mixed up with Mrs. Rothwell's endeavours to prevent the match, made full seven years ago, or be overheard by Sally when the sisters pleased to dispute upon it—and they were never known to be of one mind on any subject, except the desirableness of getting the bank property divided between them. So the hawk was grandly mysterious and mighty in directing; but when he stepped over the threshold, Mr. Keightley gave way to the brilliant anticipations which lighted up his mind at the probable success of the plan which had cost him many an hour's study and contrivance. Ned will do it, thought he, I couldn't have pitched on a fitter man for the purpose; he'll do anything for that twenty-pound note I talked of—a cunning knave, as well as a greedy one—neither I nor Neil Carlan could get out of him how he happened to know about those bones. No doubt, the rascal was Leiton's accomplice—well, that is not my business—he'll bring him to justice, perhaps bring himself also. As to his daughter, she is cunning enough, too; but Neil will manage her—nothing like love-making for managing a woman; and the attorney gave a triumphant jerk—there was one of the pleasures of memory. “I must say, those Irish creatures are clever at it—I couldn't have done the business better myself—she'll come out strong in the witness-box, I'll be bound. Yes; it is a noble plan—it must be successful—I have the game in my own hands.”

Mr. Keightley was pacing home through the quiet streets of the old country-town, to the apartments he occupied in the second floor of a house in All Saint's

Alley, which retired situation suited the days of dimness and eclipse that now rested on the Keightley family. Besides the fact that Grandville was obliged to remain on the other side of St. George's Channel, and, consequently, could not raise subsidies with his accustomed success; the attorney's practice had sustained a serious shock by the fragments of family history which Vasey and Co. made public when Hope's case was in the Bankruptcy Court. The Essex squires and farmers had been aware of the Keightleys' reputation for many a year, but things looked so much worse when printed in the London papers, that most of them began to think safer hands might be found for transacting their law business; clients had decreased—credit had done likewise—and though his office in the High Street was still referred to, and his letters taken charge of by a friendly stationer hard by, Mr. Keightley's life and business went on chiefly in the second floor in All Saint's Alley. Yet to that dwelling of his darker days the hawk flew home in triumph. That night he felt himself the avenger of Mrs. Herbert's injured and troublesome ghost—the attorney whose fame was to spread through court and newspaper as the discoverer of a long-concealed murder. Sharp Keightley knew the public interest in such cases, and, better than all, the supreme dictator over the banked gatherings of old Seldon. The keen attorney did not see, and could not guess, how quickly Ned Coster had tramped away from the door he barred behind him, as if in haste to escape from somebody, till at the top of the street the sexton's courage seemed to return—he faced about, leant his back against a convenient paling, and gazed

down in the direction of Mrs. Rothwell's house, at which Ned laughed in mingled scorn and self-congratulation. "He's a crafty cove, goin' on about law and justice, when all he wants in the world is to get the Squire laid by till he gets them Rothwells and all the money into his own fingers; but it ain't the worst thing for me," Coster muttered to himself. "If one could get twenty pounds or so, and get out of a scrape by the job. He's a crafty cove, but I'll take care on him—he'll get the blame if there's any goin'—I'll do it, though one's never safe with them women talkin'—I'm not afeard of Molly, she don't know nothin' and won't split about Liverpool times for her own sake, but that Flintshire Ann—well, if I get the Squire into it nobody'll be the wiser—what is she but a fortin-teller? I'll do it, he's a crafty cove." And thus moralizing and laying plans in his turn, Ned trudged away to the post-office for the Castleford mail, and carried it safe over that haunted road to the official hands of Mrs. Mildmay, whose duties now kept her up till one o'clock in the morning.



## CHAPTER IV.

## THE ARREST.

BLESSINGS on the world's old holidays, those white spots marked on the circle of the year by the primeval myths, and descending with them from race to race, and from creed to creed, serving in successive systems, and called by the names of many gods. The feast of Adonis has become the Christian Easter—the Roman Saturnalia turned to the Gothic yule. They come to us still with seasons and with stars, but not as they did to our fathers. We have grown too grey for their sports, and too wise for their traditions. The mechanical has beaten the picturesque out of life. It is all work and no play now, even in men's amusements. Our sanitary condition is looked after, our industry is promoted, our education gets help from every quarter, all our comforts are attended to, and we are dreadfully dull. Ages, like men, have their incompatibilities; the yule-log and the May-pole do not consort with the railway and the electric telegraph; the Lord of Misrule and the Morris-dancers are not for the neighbourhood of mechanics' insti-

tutions. There is no going backward, and few would choose to do so in good earnest—they might find witch-burning or the Star-chamber in their way; but when the present world is not entirely to one's mind, one is apt to magnify the past. So Herbert Leiton, being a country squire, and having acquired a repute for himself and his Hall, which kept off the county families, took mightily to the good old times and their customs, and Christmas was to be kept in Castleford as it never had been in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. The Hall was to be made gay with company, and merry with good cheer. The evergreens in park, shrubbery, and garden were marked to be cut down for Christmas decorations. A band of mummers suitably dressed, and organized from the Reverend Pilgrim's school-boys, were to bring in the yule-log with all its ancient honours. The Christmas carol was to be sung in full chorus in the great hall, and no end of ancient games were to be played round the Christmas fire. Doings of more public utility were also set on foot. There was to be a general sending of Christmas presents to every quarter where they were supposed to be most acceptable, including Caroline Street. There was to be a general distribution of meat, coals, and flannel to the poor; a dinner given to the dwellers in the workhouse; a grand entertainment to the Reverend Pilgrim's school; negotiations were opened with Mr. Hamilton, concerning the dinner; and there were to be speeches, of course, to the mill people, which were likely to be successful, for the manager was both prudent and good-natured; and, by way of uniting modern improvement with ancient festivity, Leiton invented a system of rewards for the owners of the best and

cleanest-kept cottages on his property. The competitors and their dwellings were to be examined and surveyed by himself, with guests and friends in grand procession, on the day preceding Twelfth Night, and the prizes were to be given at a festal gathering of all his tenantry, in the Hall, on the following evening—to close the Christmas calendar in the fashion of ancient squires, and leave a salutary impression on the mind of Castleford.

The great day of plum-puddings was coming with the end of the week. The main body of Leiton's London visitors were expected on its eve, and the muster was to be considerable, though some of the most important had sent apologies. The vacancies had been filled up from among the ancient hangers-on of Sussex Gardens, to whom an invitation never came too late. The county families should see that Castleford Hall could have company without them.

The old house was filled with the stir and bustle of preparation, and all hands were busy for the festival; Herbert arranging the programme, and giving general superintendence—he was always the man for domestic exhibitions; Jessie sending orders to the tradespeople in Colchester, seeing the presentation hampers packed, and getting Christmas finery for herself and Herbert Windham; all the Misses Leiton assisting—they left the parlour-maid to look after their mother for the time—the poor old lady was not thought producible even at Christmas. Annie Hope and Mrs. Berkley were helping, too; the latter with her sage counsel, the former with her ready hand. The work was congenial,

and had that waking-up effect which country life requires.

Under its influence Castleford Hall was gay and fearless; people had no time to think of what might be seen in the back-rooms and corners. Indeed, for some time no sight had been talked of. It had oozed out, either through Mrs. Berkley's maid or Annie's change of dormitory, that Miss Hope had seen something; but neither Herbert nor Jessie had thought proper to be aware of the transaction. Some of the back-rooms were prepared for the London visitors, and it was made public that they were to be profusely decorated with the Christmas holly. Was not that the oldest part of the house, and had it not the best right to share in the good old customs?

The festive bustle of the Hall naturally extended to the village. Every cottager was busy scrubbing, scouring, and whitewashing. The grocer and the draper, who had been extensively patronized, the people of the "Windham Arms" and the forge, the Reverend Pilgrim's school, Miss Hamilton's seminary, the lady of the post-office and her maid—for Mrs. Mildmay kept one now—all thought it prudent to humour the Squire, and bestirred themselves to polish up their respective premises. Even Ned Coster came out of his habitual laziness, and announced his intention of competing for the prize. His friends of the forge were never more astonished in all their lives than when Ned published that manifesto, and they almost believed him when, after turning out the entire contents of his cottage one clear frosty day in the middle of the week, he borrowed a wheelbarrow with great pomp and circumstance, laid his

spade across it, and went up the river's bank to get sand for his floor, which could be got best and whitest at the foot of that rough scraggy promontory overhanging Kitscove. Who the Kit had been, from whom that place was named, or what was his history, nobody in all the neighbourhood could tell. The bend of the river and the overhanging bank had been so called time out of mind; but the term had a special application to a sort of cavern under the said promontory, accessible by a narrow strip of sandbank when the Stour was low, half blocked up with sand and stones which had fallen from above, and overhung by the thick-growing brambles in which the floating bonnet of the first Mrs. Herbert had been found. After that discovery Kitscove had a bad reputation; it rather increased in blackness with the nightly terrors of Castleford. Nobody had seen the apparition there, but nobody had any business to the place. It was the loneliest spot on all the banks of the Stour; yet Ned had made it out that there was no such sand to be got anywhere. His neighbours saw him come home with the barrow well filled, but looking particularly sober, about twilight; and, just as the family were sitting down to dinner in the Hall, Ned presented himself with the same concerned countenance, and an urgent request to speak to the Squire.

"To speak to me!" said Leiton, when the butler brought up the message. "What does the fellow want? Something for his cottage, I'll warrant. He's never done grumbling for something. Tell him to come back in the morning—I am at dinner."

"If you please, sir," said the butler, coming back,

"Coster says it's something very particular he has to tell you."

"Something very particular!" cried Leiton—the Squire happened to be hungry; he had been taking a survey of his game that day, and had a plate of capital soup before him. "What does the rascal mean, to forget himself in such a manner? Tell him to come back in the morning if he wants to see me," and the butler disappeared for fear of getting involved. But it was a difficult task, and one in which most of his fellow-servants had to help, the getting rid of Ned.

"If the Squire knew what he had to tell him, he would leave the best dinner ever was put on his table. It was very hard for a poor man to come after gentle-folks' consarns, and be sent away in that fashion, and it wasn't such a pleasant business, nor much profit to him."

So Ned went grumbling away, leaving the entire company downstairs in wonder and speculation on what he had to tell the Squire, and neither in forge nor tap-room was he seen that evening.

Molly Spence's shop had become quarters too hot for the sexton since the night when the question was popped and the candlestick flung. The story of that adventure remained between the two; it was bound up with bygone transactions of a darker kind. Ned cast surly looks at the shop when he happened to pass; Molly made her wonted observations on his grumbling and laziness more readily and bitterly than before. There was no known quarrel, and Katy's conversion was going on with accelerated speed.

About the time her father was so anxious for a pri-

vate interview with the Squire, that flower of maids was seated by Molly's fire. Pins were wanted at the Hall; Katy had contrived to be sent for them to Molly's shop; and, before the rest of the gossips came in, she had detailed all that was said and done about the Christmas preparations, heard Molly's comments, and made her own.

"All them fine carryin's-on, Mrs. Spence, and judgments hangin' over the house. But I suppose it's just to quiet their consciences. Them Protestants always takes to worldly things, instead of true religion, as Miss Law said to me—though she's the biggest owld sinner among them—'Katy,' says she, 'they think to brass it out, and look grand and fine among the country gentry, keepin' up Christmas with all the ancent customs of my family; but innercent blood 'll come out, and he'll be brought to justice as sure as you're a-sowin' that camric for his brat.'"

"Well, Katy"—and the shopwoman spoke with a sigh—"murder will out, and them that has shed blood had need to fear whether they live in great or small houses. If the Squire is guilty, God help him to repent; but your wisest plan is to talk little about it, either to Miss Law or anybody else. Keep your tongue and your name clear of all evil, Katy. It's a wicked and a strange world this, and nobody knows what might come to be said of them and theirs."

Katy had frequently heard such warning words from Mrs. Spence of late, and her promise to take the advice was always ready; but, having delivered her budget, received the pins, and also an intimation that it would soon be dark, and she had better get home—Molly supervised

her proselyte in many matters of practice as well as faith—Katy had no further excuse for staying to hear what news might come in with the evening customers, or meeting Neil Carlan among them.

“Go home at once, Katy, and you’ll want no company, which is the wisest way for an honest girl. Neil’s a good boy, no doubt; but I don’t know what he’s doin’ here spindin’ money, threaten’ your father and everybody. It’s not like a steady young man makin’ ready for a house of his own. Whatever fine stories he may tell you about the markiss, and all the rest of it, Katy, depend on it there’s somethin’ odd about Neil; and, though he does belong to the true Church, the desaitfulness of men’s in him, and girls had need to be careful.”

“It’s true you’re sayin’, Mrs. Spence, and you never say nothin’ else; but you needn’t be afeard of me—I care about neither Neil Carlan nor no man that ever was born. I know they’re all desavers, and my mind’s turned to better things. ’Deed, Mrs. Spence, considerin’ the wickedness of the world, I’m just thinkin’ of goin’ into one of them holy convints, if they would take me for a sarvant or anything.”

“We’ll talk of that some other time, Katy,” said Molly, with a rather doubtful look, as the entrance of a neighbour’s wife put an end to their private conference, and Katy went her way. But the candidate for service in the “holy convints,” instead of going home, walked down the village street, then up again, half across the fields skirting the river, and back to the road, where she lingered, loitered, looked out of humour, walked on and watched the fading light with some apprehension, till



close on the park gate, when Katy heard a step behind her, but did not deign to turn till Neil Carlan was taking off his hat with,

"Miss Coster, wouldn't you let a poor fellow see your purty face."

"There's not much light to see it now, anyhow," said Katy. "Is it you, Mr. Carlan?"

"It's all that's for me. But you're not goin' in at that gate yet awhile."

"Indeed I am, Mr. Carlan. It's quite time for a respectable young woman to be at home, considerin' the place and what's said about it. If you had been in a hurry to keep me company, you could have come to Mill Street an hour ago."

"By the five crosses I couldn't, Katy, bekase I was in Colchester seein' the attorney, and it's not safe for us to stand long here neither. But, Katy, I just want to tell you it's all nearly made out. He says the evidence is complete to the thrifle. Of coorse I don't understand it, these law gintlemen spakes so mighty fine and larned; but you're to be the principal witness, and we'll get the reward to set up our own house in London, Katy—that's what consarns me. You see?" And the Irishman came closer, and caught Katy's hand.

"Keep your distance, Mr. Carlan," said the convert, pretending to draw back.

"I can't, Katy. The prospect of callin' you my own when Father Murphy makes us one, and you go with me, lookin' like Venus wid a silk gown and a satin bonnet, to set up our own public—it's to be called 'The Charmin' Katy'—in Holborn Bars, wid your own livin' picther for a sign. That's after we get the reward—

three hundred down. But, as I was sayin', you're to be the principal witness." Both Katy's hands were now clasped, and not withdrawn. "You see your father has to tell somethin' the attorney bid him to the Squire, and you're to be listenin'."

"Goodness me, how am I to do that, Neil? They'll be speakin' in the study if it's private."

"Maybe not, Katy. But wherever it happens, listen if you can. Our public depends on it. We'll not get the three hundred, if you can't hear what's said and take an oath on't. But there's Mary Collins spyin' about. Good night, my darlint. Murther, but it's hard to part from you widout a kiss." And Neil retired with an air of unwillingness and regret which any actor in a melodrama might have envied; but when the gate had closed on the object of his idolatry, he looked scornfully after her, and muttered to himself,

"She'll listen, not a doubt of it, the desaitful Judas, that has eat their bread and flattered them up so long. Howsomever, it'll all come right. The gallows 'll get nothin' but it's own when it gets the Squire, that's sartin. Katy 'll be resaived into the bosom of the Church. Thin, plaise God, I'll wash my hands of her, and retrait to the porther's place Mr. Keightley's to get me in the London Bank." With which consolatory reflections Neil walked whistling away.

The forenoon of the following day found everybody in Castleford Hall about their own business. Herbert had gone on an exploring walk through his park and plantations, to choose a Christmas tree from among the young firs with which he had covered many a stony spot on the banks of the Stour. Ned Coster had been

inquiring for him some time after he went out, to the renewal of the household wonder; and the footman, after vain endeavours to make out what he wanted, had sent him off to find the Squire if he could. Jessie, and all the Misses Leiton, were in the housekeeper's room, getting a hamper of great capacity packed for the Monros in Liverpool; it had been agreed between her and Herbert that the distance was too great for any of them to think of coming that Christmas. Mrs. Berkeley was in her own room, getting out of her numerous correspondents' debt; and Annie Hope was fearing and wondering because her father had not come, and there was no letter. In reply to her warning note, he had written to say that his mind told him there was something wrong with Herbert and Jessie, as there had been for a considerable time, but whatever it was, he knew his Annie would act wisely, and keep up her heart till he came, which would be early in the Christmas week, and he would find some excuse for not bringing the boys. An intimation of his coming had been written to Herbert, also; it was almost a fortnight ago—the Christmas week was wearing to its end, yet no Hope and no letter. There might be one at the post-office," thought Annie, "and it is long to wait till evening, I'll slip on my bonnet and walk down to Mrs. Mildmay." No sooner thought than done, Annie's bonnet and shawl were on—it was a clear, frosty day—that winter was unusually fine till the new year came in—but on her way downstairs Annie happened to look out of the lobby window, and noticed somebody stealing along under the high box-hedge which separated the kitchen from the flower-garden, and terminated at a small back gate leading

into the shrubbery, and thence, by a narrow walk, to the open park.

The figure was stooping and half-hidden by the hedge; it was evidently not intended to be seen, but Annie knew the gait and shawl of Katy Coster, at that moment supposed to be at work on a tunic for Herbert Windham, in the back parlour. Betsy Collins had been hinting to Fritchine, who of course told Mrs. Berkley, something of Neil Carlan's courtship. "She's bound on an assignation," thought Annie; "what a queer time to choose! I hope Jessie won't go in to see how she gets on with the tunic;" and having seen her steal out of the back gate, and carefully close it, Annie stepped out, leaving a quiet message with the housemaid to tell Mrs. Herbert that she was gone for a walk and some trifles she wanted in the village, and would be back long before dinner. Scarcely had she got into the avenue, however, before Annie perceived there was a lion in the way, for there was Miss Law, in her old black gown and indescribable bonnet, marching to the gate, and, doubtless, bound for the village. The last of the Windhams had taken a peculiar fancy to her cousin Hope's daughter, and a special inclination to tell her all her grievances. "She'll not grumble to me along the road to-day," thought the young girl, as she turned into a by-way leading across the park to a path by the river side, by which, though a circuitous route, she could enter the village at the foot of Mill Street.

The trees in that direction were all of Leiton's planting; Annie walked on, admiring how well they had grown, in spite of the winter bareness—how it would surprise her father when he saw them—what small

saplings they had been when he was last there, at the time of Jessie's home-coming; but what detained him, and why didn't he write? The frozen grass crisped under her feet—that by-path was little trodden—the robins sang on the leafless boughs above, and the faint, broken sunshine flashed and glistened on the brown trunks and frosted branches; it was glorious winter weather! Annie's step was light, and her heart would have been so but for that absent father. Yet the fresh, free spirit of the woodland, which dwells yet in glade and covert, though nymphs and dryads have been gone for many an age, breathed upon her through the bracing air and murmuring trees. She could catch gleams of the sunlight on the river, through long vistas of over-arching boughs, and see the smoke of farm-houses far off among the fields on the opposite bank. "How pleasant to walk by one's self," thought the active girl; "I'll see how the river looks beyond this clump of firs; how thick and green they are!" Annie stopped, not with fright, but surprise, for in the fir clump which she was skirting, somebody spoke, as if continuing a low and earnest conversation, and the voice was that of Herbert Leiton. There was an opening in the boughs through which she could see without being seen; Annie did not intend to act the spy, but she had a woman's curiosity, and had heard of the sexton's anxiety to see the Squire. There stood Ned Coster, close by a straight young fir, which Leiton might have been choosing for his Christmas tree; and there stood Herbert, his face half turned away, as if he didn't wish the sexton to see it; but it was plain to Annie, and there

was a look of terror and confusion, which she had never seen in Herbert's face before.

"In course it would make a great talk in the country—there would be an inquests, I suppose—and where's the good on it?" said Coster, looking at the ground.

"No good at all, Ned; the people of this place talk a great deal too much—not that I care how much they talk—but it is Christmas time, my London friends are coming down, and Mrs. Herbert wouldn't like such a report in our neighbourhood," said Leiton, still averting his face. "It is a very strange, very unpleasant circumstance; somebody, as you say, has been got rid of by unlawful means, but it must have been years ago if there is nothing there but bare bones—are you sure of that, Ned?"

"Quite sure, your honour. You may come to Kitscove, and see them yourself."

"No—oh, no," said Leiton, with a shudder. "The best and the wisest thing is to get them buried, Ned, quietly, and out of hand. No inquest, no inquiry, could make out the murderer at this distance of time; the crime may have been committed before we were born. As you have offered to do it, I'll pay you for your trouble. Get them down to the churchyard some night, and bury them decently; it will save a great deal of trouble to the county magistrates, and foolish talk and superstitious fears to the neighbours. But remember, Ned, you do it all by yourself, and keep a close mouth on the subject; it will not do to put it in everybody's mouth when the business is done."

"Never fear, your honour. I knows how they can talk here, expecially the women. They'll not get a

word out of me. It'll be a hard job to do by oneself, and not a pleasant thing, neither. I would do it for nobody but your honour; but I know you'll consider the trouble, and I'll do it this night if you please."

"The sooner the better, Ned. Come along this way, and I'll see about getting you the sack myself. You must not let the servants see you about the Hall again—they might wonder what you were after. Such people are always curious," and Leiton moved on through the fir, followed by the sexton, assuring him that "there was nothink he hated like curious, spyin' folks."

Annie stood still for a minute or two. The face she had seen looking in upon her through the half-open door of her bedroom had scarcely frightened the girl more than the talk she heard so unintentionally in that clump of firs. Herbert Leiton, her father's cousin, was guilty of murder, and had been half discovered by the ill-natured, clownish, sottish sexton, who must now be employed as his agent in the concealment, and might betray him at any moment.

Rapidly and full of strange thoughts Annie walked away, skirted the river, turned up Mill Street, and reached Mrs. Mildmay's post-office, to see the honest, good-humoured woman lay down her sewing at the window in haste to answer Miss Hope's knock.

"There is one letter for you, Miss; and I would have sent it up if anybody had been going to the Hall, as they never send for the letters till the evening," she said, presenting one. It was her father's hand, and Annie opened it at once. "Won't you come in and take a seat in the parlour to read it, Miss?" said the

postmistress ; but Annie had read it before her invitation was finished, for the note was short and sad.

“DEAR ANNIE,—I have woful news to tell you, but it must be written. My dear and trusty friend Louis Le Fort, in stepping from the American ship *Carolina* into the boat which was to take him ashore, lost his footing, we think, by a lurch of the boat—the tide was running strong down the Mersey at the time, and his corpse was not found till three hours after. Annie, I cannot come to you—I cannot leave Madame Le Fort in her sorrow. Pray for her, for her loss is not to be made up in this world. Pray for me, too, for I have lost my friend ; but, thank God, I have still my daughter. And whatever is amiss among the Leitons write and let me know. I would ask you to come to me, but you are a stranger to Madame, and she is in sore trouble. Write soon to your poor and loving father,

HENRY HOPE.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Mildmay, but I have reason to go home at once,” said Annie, putting up the letter with as much composure as she could assume.

It was not enough to prevent the observant postmistress from thinking Miss Hope had received bad news. Bad it was. She knew the death of Le Fort, so sudden and unexpected, would be a heavy blow to her father, and therefore she grieved. It was also a blow to their worldly prospects. The London office on which they had built for better times was now gone with him, and Henry and Desmond would probably lose their places, for Mr. Le Fort had no heir to manage his business, and she recollected—how forcibly now!—



Mr. Johnstone's threat of turning them out of the house, which he had bought.

These, it must be confessed, were the chief points of Annie's sorrow. She remembered the Le Forts but faintly, as part of her father's society in New Orleans. She had never seen them since, and could not miss the dead; yet it was hard that her father's dear and trusty friend should have slipped from a ship's side down into the deep strong current of the Mersey. How much strange and sad news she had got on that walk from Castleford Hall to the village and back! But so life is parcelled out to most of us—its events crowded into short spaces, with long blanks between that have no story to tell.

Her father had not said so in his hurried note, but Annie knew that the duty of explaining his absence to the Leitons devolved on her. She found them all in the drawing-room. The short December day was already closing, and the family generally assembled there in the twilight, but never without the back-window curtains drawn, since the ladies of Ashley Manor sat with them. It was a large, handsome room, furnished with rosewood, hung with purple damask, and no lack of paint and gilding. The ruddy light of the evening fire flashed on its polished mirrors and painted walls; all looked rich, warm, and cheerful.

Herbert was there, as easy and good-humoured as if he had not talked about the bones and the sack with Ned Coster in that clump of firs. Was it courage or custom that made the man so insensible to the sword, or rather the rope, that dangled over him? Jessie was talking of getting up the holly, for next day was Christ-

mas eve; and Katy Coster had just come in with the declaration that she couldn't finish Master Herbert Windham's tunic without rose-coloured silk, but with the help of goodness she should go to Colchester for some to-morrow.

"Yes, Katy, you shall go. The mill-waggon will take you up and down—I know it goes to-morrow—and don't forget to call at the 'Crown' for my London parcel. I do wish to wear that ruby satin on Christmas evening. She is such an attentive creature," continued Mrs. Herbert, when Katy had made her declarations against forgetting, and closed the door—"it makes one overlook many little faults," and she glanced at Mrs. Berkley.

"Of course it does—and of course it ought," said Herbert. "But here's Annie come back with a letter in her hand. What news, my truant girl? Are you sure it was not for a billet-doux, instead of a letter from your father, you went to the Post-Office?"

Annie told her bad news, and there was general regret. I am sorry for it, Annie—sorry to hear that your father has lost a friend in such a sudden and shocking manner. But this is an uncertain life," moralised Herbert. "I had set my heart on seeing him here this Christmas; but he is in the way of his duty. Hope is a noble fellow, and will always do the right thing. I wish I had been like him."

"What a sad thing—what a pity of the poor lady," said Jessie. "We shall all miss Cousin Hope. As you say, Herbert, he always does the right thing; but you needn't wish to be like him—I'm sure you are quite as good."

"I never was," said Herbert, stirring the fire. Was it a thought of the Bury times that made Jessie turn the conversation at this point somewhat abruptly, by asking, "Herbert, dear, did you see Ned Coster or find out what he wanted? He was here again this forenoon in such a fluster, we all wondered what he could have to say."

"The roof of his cottage wants mending, and he is going to compete for the prize." Herbert stirred the coals once more, and looked into their glowing depths.

"Troublesome creature, to make such a fuss about that! I wish you had told him to bring us up some yew from those fine trees about the churchyard. We'll want it to mix with the holly," said Jessie.

That evening Annie sat writing to her father a long, sad, fearful letter, grieving with him for the loss of his friend—telling him what she had seen, what she had heard, and what she dreaded regarding the Leitons. They knew she was writing, and all sent sympathising messages. Annie found room only for Mrs. Berkley's—she knew it would be the most acceptable. The old lady was a relation, and probably ought to be warned of what she had heard among the firs; but Hope's daughter would take his opinion first. It was weird work to put it all on paper in the solitude of her own room, with the dim candle and flickering firelight, starting at every coal that fell from the grate, and now and then screwing up desperate courage to look into the darkened corners. But she could not write such matter in the drawing-room, where the ladies sat with their small industry, and Herbert read "Bracebridge Hall" to them out of "The American Sketch-Book;" neither

could she miss the evening mail, to which the coachman and butler would take down her letter when they went to escort the Misses Leiton home; but Annie did not know how late that mail would be, for want of a carrier.

Some time before she began to write, while the family party sat wishing over the first of the mince-pies, which Jessie insisted on trying that evening, to make sure that they were worthy of the London visitors, two travellers, in a post-chaise, arrived at the "Windham Arms." They had supper in the best parlour—drank three bottles of stout, supplemented with hot gin and water—from which striking signs, and a gratuity larger than common at the "Windham Arms," the waiter pronounced them to be gentlemen, and no mistake. How far they had taken the man of napkins into confidence was known but to him and themselves, but he informed the kitchen and taproom inquirers that their business was with Mr. Hamilton, of the paper-mill, and they would go back to Colchester the same night. It was not a night in which gentlemen would have preferred to travel. The day had been clear, but with the fall of evening a dense fog began to creep up from the river, and now lay thick and grey on Castleford and the surrounding country, as cold and damp as a Scotch mist. Yet the travellers buttoned on their great-coats, left the comfortable parlour fire some minutes after eleven (a late hour for Mr. Hamilton to do business, considering that the lights were always out in the manager's house soon after ten); but they paid their bill and sallied forth, leaving their own postilion orders to wait for them at the opening of the Colchester road. People did not go out much after eleven in Castleford. The "Windham

Arms," being under strict regulations, had to shut at that hour—at least in appearance—though things could be had for an hour after; but that was a dull night—country customers thought it better to get home early, before the fog thickened—the village loungers had taken a turn for staying by their own firesides. Yet there was one piece of news afloat sometime before the travellers left, for Mrs. Mildmay's maid came to the inn inquiring for Ned Coster, with the intimation that the mail had been made up half-an-hour and more. Ned was not to be found in the taproom, in the forge, nor in Molly Spence's shop—where they thought of looking for him last. Neither was he in his own cottage, where Neil and Dennis Carlan went in search of him—the former had been obliged to go to Colchester that afternoon on a message from the "markiss," and declared himself "murtherin' tired;" but he wouldn't see Ned turned out of his "sitivation." The coals were dead on the hearth, and the sexton's spade was stuck fast in the nearest corner of the churchyard, where he had been digging a grave, though there was no funeral expected in the village or its neighbourhood. Neil said it was "oncommon remarkable;" but all the inquiries made by himself and brother—they went on the search in company—at the houses of Ned's acquaintances, failed to get any intelligence of the missing post. And after waiting till near twelve o'clock, Mrs. Mildmay succeeded in bribing two stable-boys to set out on the haunted road with the Castleford mail.

Colchester enjoyed at the time of our story, and probably still rejoices in a privilege common to most country towns—that of everybody knowing everybody's

business. But that week it was as busy as Castleford, though after a different fashion. Its butchers, bakers, and grocers were doing a trade which would have made them rich, and worn themselves and their assistants out in a twelvemonth. The rest of its fishmongers was broken by the barrels of oysters wanted in London—its householders were getting home their boys for the holidays—providing for their Christmas dinners, and perhaps thinking of their Christmas bills. These weighty considerations, together with the prize beef and fat turkeys exhibited, diverted the attention of all but the most vigilant gossips from the frequent but private interviews which the too well known attorney, Sharp Keightley, held with the chief magistrate of their ancient borough.

Mr. Russell, the gentleman who figured in the fable of the twenty-pound note propounded for Ned Coster's edification, in the Rothwell's back-parlour, was a distant relation to the Russell of Seldon's bank, one of the most successful fishmongers in the town, the lessee of certain oyster beds at the mouth of the Colne, and Mayor of Colchester that year. He was what is popularly termed a good sort of a man, with just enough education to carry on his business—what more was ever thought necessary for the chief magistrate of an English town?—and nothing remarkable in or about him, except a capability of being worked up to anything by anybody—and the greatest talker always succeeded best in the process. The attorney did not dine with the Mayor, as set forth in the fable; but he called at his house one morning in a state of obvious agitation, requesting to see Mr. Russell, as he had some-

thing particular to communicate, and was shown into a room which the worthy magistrate sometimes called his study, and sometimes his office. Books were balanced and judicial advice given there; and out of it, after a conference of more than ordinary length, Mr. Keightley came with the air of a man who had relieved his conscience, and the Mayor looked profoundly impressed with something for the rest of the day. Mr. Russell was a widower, with two daughters at a finishing school, and a respectable elderly housekeeper—so the attorney's comings were not canvassed in his domestic circle. But come the attorney did—day after day the same close and private conference was held in the study—the Mayor looked more and more impressed when it was over. At length letters were sent by mounted messengers to most of the county magistrates, and among them the old Squire who hunted with Sir George Windham. He had held the commission of the Peace for more than forty years. The letters brought the magistrates together in Mr. Russell's study on the forenoon of Christmas eve. It was a weighty as well as a private business, for a whisper had crept out from the police office that, on the previous night, two trusty men had been sent to Castleford, on information privately communicated to the inspector, to arrest Ned Coster, the sexton, whom they caught at midnight coming down the river side with a sack, containing a human skeleton, on his back. It was but a whisper, and reached few in the town—they were close people, and more or less connected with the officials. To them only it was known that the sexton and his ghastly burden were brought quietly in at the back-door, and examined by the as-

sembled magistrates—that a new-made grave had been discovered in the churchyard by the active policeman—that a young woman, supposed to be the sexton's daughter and Mrs. Herbert Leiton's maid, was brought in at the back-door some minutes after her father—that affidavits were made and depositions taken—and that something remarkable would happen in Castleford that night.

Castleford had no consciousness of that coming marvel. The day had gone, as Christmas eve should go, in a quiet fuss of domestic preparation with most of its inhabitants. The mill waggon had proceeded to Colchester filled with the villagers intent on making their last purchases for Christmas, with Katy Coster among them, to get the rose-coloured silk for Herbert Windham's tunic, and bring home the ruby satin to his mother. The waggon had come back, but it did not bring Katy. Her mistress was inclined to be angry, for in spite of an early dinner, and other helps to facility, the household arrangements were somewhat backward. All hands were wanted to cut down the holly, get the yew to mix with it—Jessie had set her heart on that, as ladies do on small matters at times—and Herbert was afraid that the mummers he had been drilling in their parts for the last fortnight would be found failures for want of the appropriate costume in which they were to bring in Christmas to the Hall. It consisted of sundry ancient doublets and antiquated sacks of tarnished velvet and faded brocade, which had hung in a large corner cupboard or wardrobe at the end of the passage close by the room which Annie Hope had vacated so silently, and with such good reason. How long they had hung there



nobody could tell. The newest of them was said to have been worn by Sir George Windham's grandmother, when presented to George the Second's queen, Caroline, by Lady Suffolk. But they would do for the mummers, and Herbert was in a fret because they had not been brought out for him to look over that afternoon, for Jessie had been busy about a hundred things—the key had got mislaid among her drawers and boxes, and was not found till the twilight was falling. It came heavy and soon, the fog of the previous night had made the day brief and gloomy, but heaps of the holly and mistletoe, with which the house was to be decorated, lay in the Hall. All the servants, except Betsy Collins, were out cutting the rest of it under Herbert's inspection, that the festive green might be up before his London visitors came. Mrs. Berkley was taking a nap in her own room, Annie was making a wreath for Jessie's picture in the back drawing-room—the Aurora with a scarf was called by its right name now—and Jessie, with the key in her hand, and Herbert Windham in her arms—the child was more than commonly fretful that day, and would not stay from his mother—went up to open the corner cupboard and get out the costumes, desiring Betsy Collins to follow and carry it down, for Herbert would never be satisfied if he did not see it all.

Every sound was audible in the silent house. Annie heard her go up-stairs talking to the child, and Betsy Collins following some minutes after. Then Mrs. Berkley's bell rang, and knowing that Fritchine was out with the rest of the servants, she ran to see what the old lady wanted.

"Is it you, Annie dear? What a long sound sleep I have had, and how quiet the house is! Where is Fritchine? I wanted her to bring me my slippers."

"She's out helping to cut down the holly; but I'll find them," said Annie. As she spoke there came a terrible shriek from the back passage, another, and another, and Betsy Collins rushed into the room like one in a frenzy of fear, slammed the door, and fell fainting against it, while the shrieks of Jessie and the screams of the child came mingled with the sound of scuffling along the passage. With more strength than she ever believed herself mistress of, Annie dragged the fainting girl from the door, pulled it open, and would have rushed out, but Jessie, with her clothes torn, her hair dishevelled, but still clasping the child, dropped at her feet. At that very moment the three Misses Leiton, with the coachman and Mary Collins' son carrying great bundles of the coveted yew, marched up the avenue, and joined a procession of the servants, laden with evergreens, and led by Herbert, with a great branch of holly, covered with bright red berries, in his hand.

"Good luck to Castleford Hall! Here we come with the Christmas holly!" he cried, swinging open the outer door, which had been left on the latch. Annie heard the incoming, and ran to the top of the stairs, crying, "Mary, Ellen, Lizzie, for goodness sake come here!" The women knew there was something wrong and dropped their bundles, but Herbert was up first. At one lift the strong man caught up his wife and child and laid them on Mrs. Berkley's bed.

"Are they dead?" he said, in a hoarse whisper; but the

fading light which fell on Jessie's face from the window showed him that she was in strong convulsions. "Jackson," he cried to the groom at the top of his voice, "saddle the roan, and ride for your life to Colchester. Bring Dr. Adams, or any doctor you can find. Mrs. Herbert has met with an accident." Then he unclasped his heir from the poor mother's arms. Her hold was so firm it required all his strength to loose it. The boy had fainted from fright, but now recovered far enough to sob and cry, as children do in their terror; and Betsy Collins, having gathered sense and strength again, came out of the corner where Annie had left her, and took charge of him. They threw water on poor Jessie's face, burned feathers, held hartshorn to her nose, and at last she opened her eyes.

"Jessie! my wife! my darling! what has happened to you?" cried Herbert, who had bent over her all the time. But she looked at him with a strange wild stare, and said, in a voice not like her own, "We thought her dead and buried, but she has been staying in the cupboard among the old clothes all these years, to come out on me and try to take Herbert Windham from me. I wouldn't let her have him though," and with a shriek of hysterical laughter Jessie relapsed into convulsions more violent than before. The fit lasted nearly an hour. In the midst of it the doctor's carriage wheels were heard, and everybody gathered courage. Dr. Adams, the Leitons' medical adviser, was a tall dark-complexioned man of the Vasey school, but neither so old nor so long-winded, known to be very discreet, and to have the best family practice in Essex. He seemed to comprehend the case with professional instinct, and re-

sorted to the usual methods for restoring hysterical patients, which at length proved so far successful that the convulsive motion of limb and feature ceased, though Jessie neither spoke nor looked up, but sank into a hard-breathing stupor, which Dr. Adams hoped would merge into natural sleep. Then the room was cleared of all superfluous hands, and Annie, shocked and wearied (for she had been doing her best to help the doctor and everybody), retired to her own room, where she found Betsy Collins sitting by the fire with Herbert Windham on her knee. The child was sobbing himself to sleep, and she was trying to hush him ; but the poor woman's face was whiter than her apron, and she trembled all over like an aspen leaf. In the general concern about her mistress nobody had thought of poor Betsy, but Annie ran down-stairs and brought her a glass of wine.

"Thank you, Miss, thank you ; but I can't drink it. I know I deserve nothing but the worst of blame for shutting the door as I did, but I was frightened out of my senses, Miss," and Betsy began to cry.

"You should not have shut the door, Betsy. But I know you didn't do it intentionally. Drink the wine, and tell me what you saw in the passage."

"I'll tell you as true as if it were my last words, Miss," said Betsy, laying down the empty glass. "You know we went up to bring down the costoms, and I was after the missis with a basket out of the laundry comin' along the back passage. I heard her turn the key in the cupboard, and say to Master Herbert it was a stiff lock. Then, Miss, I heard a kind of a growl, unhearthly like—it freezes my blood to think on't—and

there, as I live and speak to you, was the first Mrs. Herbert with a hold of the missis, tryin' to take the child from her; and I could stand it no longer, but run into Mrs. Berkley's room. I didn't mean to close the door on the missis, but I didn't know what I was about with fear; and something in my mind tells me she'll never get the better of it." Something in Annie's mind confirmed that prediction, but she said differently to comfort poor Betsy, and sat down with her at the fire.

The confusion in that house was great, but not noisy; for fear mingled with it. All its inhabitants were grouped in different rooms; the park gate and the outer door stood open—nobody remembered to shut them; and nobody noticed, in the misty night which had now fallen, that four policemen walked quietly up the avenue—two going round to the back of the house, while the other two approached the hall-door, and, finding it open, stepped in.

The messengers of fate are seldom heard in their coming. Annie thought the groom and coachman were stepping upstairs on some errand, but the same instant Herbert and the doctor entered to see about the child and question Betsy Collins.

"You needn't leave the room, Annie; you're a relation, and a discreet girl," said Leiton, closing the door. As he did so, there was a sharp knock at it.

"What do you want?" he said; but nobody answered. Herbert swung the door open and stepped out, and Annie saw two policemen lay each a hand on his shoulder, while one of them presented a paper saying,

"Mr. Leiton, you are our prisoner. We arrest you on this warrant."

The warrant was signed by Gregory Staunton, the old squire who had hunted with Sir George Windham, and granted on informations charging Herbert Leiton with the crime of murder, and sworn before him and his brother magistrates that day by Edward and Katherine Coster.

"I don't want to escape, for I'm not guilty," said Herbert. "Let me remain but one hour, to see if my wife lives or dies."

"We can't do it, Mr. Leiton—it ain't our duty," said the policeman. There were four in the passage now.

"Go with them quietly, Mr. Leiton," said Doctor Adams—how prepared he seemed for the emergency. "If you are not guilty, Providence will clear up your innocence. There is no use in raising a noise in the house to frighten your wife still more. I will take as much care of her as if you were present, and not leave her till she is out of danger."

"God bless you, doctor—I'll go," said Herbert, with a look of hopeless resignation. "Annie, I'm not guilty of this crime, though I may suffer for it. You and your father are all the friends I can depend on. Write to him; and don't forsake poor Jessie. Break it to my sisters as well as you can. Good night." He wrung her hand, and was gone before she could utter a word.

So, without the knowledge of any but those three out of all his household, over the heaps of Christmas holly which he had cut down in such glee, out of the hall-door at which his London visitors were to be received

and the long-drilled mummers to make their appearance, Herbert Leiton was marched that Christmas eve, in the custody of four policemen, to a chaise waiting hard by his own park gate. It was the same in which Ned and the sack had travelled, and conveyed him to the same destination—the station-house in Colchester.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE NINE DAYS' WONDER.

News for the papers, for the firesides, and the tea-tables—news to be talked of at the Baronet's Christmas party, and where the hob-nails sit over their pots of beer. A country squire, a county magistrate, a man of station and of property, arrested for the murder of his first wife, with all the details thereto appended! The half-scandal, the hasty second marriage, the apparition said to haunt the guilty house. Never was there such a godsend to the Press men in that dull December time. London reporters came down to Castleford armed with full powers for getting at particulars. Never was there such custom to the "Windham Arms;" never was there such an abundance of strong beer bestowed on labourers, mill-people, and errand-boys; never was there such a friendly going into cottages by gentlemen with pins and chains; never such admiration of the dirty children, and amiable sitting down with gossiping women; never was there such a talking-time in any village. It wrought a social revolution—though a temporary one—greater than



either politics or religion could have effected. The servants at the Hall rose in importance far above the Reverend Pilgrim, the mill-manager, the draper, and the grocer. The Carlans flourished like green bay-trees with the "gintlemen" from London. Ned Coster returned to his cottage beside the church-yard, and found himself famous. The quantity of the best beer consumed by that exemplary sexton, after being bound over to appear at the trial in the character of principal witness, was almost fabulous; and his excellent daughter—determined to share his triumph out of, as well as in, the witness-box—took up her abode in the paternal home, and became such an attraction to the London and Colchester inquirers that Neil Carlan's interests appeared to be in jeopardy. Great were the reports, and long, in all the newspapers. The *Colchester Chronicle*, having obtained the earliest information—its reporter had been a clerk to Sharp Keightley in his day—could not print fast enough to supply the demand, and made a county reputation by the business. Had the days of spirit-rapping then dawned, who can tell to what powerful purpose the mighty terrors of Castleford might have been worked? But those were the times of useful knowledge and material laws, when ghosts were pooh-poohed by everybody intending to be sensible, and all the supernatural was explained by optic illusion and states of the nervous system. Nevertheless, in the midst of the pooh-poohing and the explanations, the old belief or instinct kept its place in men's minds, as it has done from age to age—sometimes retiring into the background, sometimes coming out in strong and strange relief. The latter is the case in our own day—the

former was at the time of our story. High-class journals printed the details of the Castleford apparition with apologies for mentioning such vulgar superstitions, fathers of families pronounced them silly, and smart young men wondered that respectable papers could give space to the like.

But the details were read and remembered better than any portion of the report, and through all the land the Castleford murder went like wildfire, waking up back-parlours, astonishing kitchens, and giving drawing-rooms that inestimable boon to British society—something to talk about. The nearer the scene of action the greater was the din. Colchester spent a great Christmas; for with the holly and mistletoe, the roast-beef and plum-pudding, came that long-expected and yet surprising news.

The dream of Sharp Keightley's nights and days was realised in some measure, as all our dreams are apt to be. He was the wonderful attorney, known to be the chief discoverer of Leiton's guilt—though it did not accord with Mr. Keightley's policy to make public the why and how. The little hawk spread its wings and set up its feathers mightily in Caroline Street. The Misses Rothwell listened to his fragmentary and lengthy narratives of the measures he had taken, and prepared savoury suppers for him with joyful hearts; for the bank property was now within sight, and their mother, having got an inkling of it through her haze, came to the conclusion that Harriet was put quite against Herbert Leiton, and would never marry, but always board with them, and help to maintain their position.

Was it Herbert Leiton's sin, or his evil star, that

was finding him out? It made little difference to the newsmen and the gossips—mankind always take the one for the other—but the man of professions and appearances, of great regard for the world and its sayings, and great fear of remark and censure, had run the gauntlet of that world's opinion, and was meeting with strange consequences, whether deserved or not. Yet Herbert's friends and enemies agreed that he stood it wonderfully, and the newspapers, when reporting how he was brought before three of the county magistrates—by-the-bye, Gregory Staunton was one of them—on the morning after Christmas, which festive day Leiton spent in the station-house, stated that he went through his examination with dignified composure, solemnly asserted his innocence, and was fully committed to take his trial at the ensuing assizes.

To return to Castleford Hall, in that night of fear and confusion. So quietly had the business been done that, of the three who saw it, two only were conscious—namely, Annie and the doctor. Poor Betsy Collins was so occupied with her own difficulties that she was not aware her master had been arrested till some time after. Annie knew it all, felt the full horror of the event and its consequences, believed in Herbert's guilt almost in spite of herself, and stood there at the half-open door listening to his and the policemen's steps till the last foot had gone out, and there was silence in the house, except the hum of low voices heard from the different rooms. Doctor Adams was examining the sleeping child, and questioning Betsy about her mistress's fright. One would never have known by his manner that anything else had happened.

She quietly closed the door, and stole into the next room, where Mrs. Berkley and Mary Collins sat watching by the fire, and Jessie lay in that hard breathing stupor. The old lady looked shocked and shaken, but she was the fittest person to hear the news in the house. Annie motioned her to the passage, and there in a low whisper told the terrible tidings. There was no use in attempting to break it slowly to Mrs. Berkley.

"I knew it would happen sooner or later, Annie," she said, in the same low tone; "but I had hoped never to see it. It has happened, as evil things always do, at the worst time. And poor Jessie, what a fearful business hers has been! Annie, there are evil spirits. Yet, if she never recover, it will be a mercy. Where are his sisters?"

"I don't know," said Annie, "and I can't tell them."

"I'll do it, dear; but there is more than that to be done. The servants should know it, for they must; and those people from London will be coming—it would neither be prudent nor proper to receive them under such circumstances. Send the coachman and Mary Collins's son down to the lodge to let them know how the case stands, and recommend them to go back the way they came. Those who want accommodations for the night will find them in Colchester. Let nobody make noise to disturb Jessie, if you can, and I'll endeavour to keep the Leitons quiet."

The three sisters, who had come with the yew and got dreadfully frightened, were found in the back drawing-room, with a large prayer-book and a small tea-tray on the table before them; and a half-suppressed concert of groans and cries, a few minutes after Mrs.

Berkley entered, made the servants sensible that something had happened to their master. In some minutes more the news had crept through the entire household without noise or demonstration. The coachman and Ned Collins took up their station at the park gate, and gigs and chaises were heard to come and go in rapid succession. The cheerful and intellectual society with which the long dark evenings were to be enlivened, and Christmas kept in the fashion of the good old times in Castleford Hall, drove back to Colchester with very severe reflections on its unlucky master for bringing them so far to be disappointed by his arrest, and gave the first information of that event to the good people of the "Crown."

Then the intelligence had to be written to Mr. Hope, to the Monros, to Miss Scott—these were the only quarters from which help and sympathy could be expected out of Leiton's once extensive circle; and, as one who had been tried in former extremities, Annie wrote to Barrett Vasey. She finished those woful letters, and dispatched them by the night mail. There was nobody else fit for writing in that house. She assisted in restoring domestic order, and helped Mrs. Berkley to comfort, or at least to quiet, the poor Leitons. It was no easy task. The blow was heavy enough to have staggered stronger minds. Herbert had been the crown of their pride and the staff of their trust, their only and always kind brother, the man who thought and did for them, and it was pitiful to see the poor helpless sisters, now in the afternoon of single life, wringing their hands, declaring his innocence, and crying what should they and their mother do.

When the Pilgrims came up to make inquiries, the misery of the scene was only increased. But by far the worst was Miss Law's coming in to sympathise. How she got the intelligence remained a problem to Annie for many a day. But the last of the Windhams entered the hall, pocket-handkerchief in hand—by-the-bye, it was a very old and dirty one—and would have made considerable noise about her dear, darling, innocent cousin, if Mrs. Berkley had not stopped her. When the Leitons and Pilgrims had gone home with their real grief—for nothing could induce one of them to spend the night at the Hall—she was with difficulty prevented from sitting up with Annie, the housemaid, and Mary Collins, to watch in poor Jessie's room, and for the first time in her life something like fear seemed to trouble the old woman's mind, as she retired to her solitary cottage. Were the events of that terrible night too much for even her callous nature? The accumulation of horrors has a different effect on more sensitive spirits. Macbeth knew it in the midst of his ruin, when he had no tears to shed for his wife, and said, "She should have died before." So when the house was all at rest, and the two women who watched with her sat dozing by the fire—while Annie heard the hard unnatural breathing and abrupt moan that now and then broke from poor Jessie, while she thought of Herbert's guilt—of his probable condemnation, for who could tell how clear the evidence against him might be?—of her father's lost friend and ruined prospects—she felt as if the ship in which her life was embarked were going to pieces, and nothing could be added to the wreck. Had the dead Mrs. Herbert looked in upon her then, she would

scarcely have felt frightened. But the door remained closed, and the house silent. The vengeful spirit had done mischief enough that night. Every time Annie looked to the bed it crossed her, like a whisper of fate, that some spring in the vital machinery there had gone wrong; and would never be rectified on this side of the grave. True to his promise, Doctor Adams slept in the house, and left the watchers orders to call him if any change appeared. It is to be hoped the worthy doctor slept well, for in the previous night he had examined the skeleton taken with Ned Coster, and made his report to the county magistrates; but who was the wiser at the Hall? The night was one of intense stillness. The grey cold fog of dull December lay thick and moveless on village, park, and river, and every sound seemed magnified by its silence. In the earlier hours Annie could hear the barking of dogs from distant farm-houses, and the crowing of cocks, so frequent about midnight at that season; but when all the outer sounds had ceased, and the hard breathing was becoming more like natural sleep, there went past the house, as if coming from the shrubbery, a rapid and not light step. Who could be abroad at that hour?—and what was their business? Perhaps a policeman on some secret survey of the premises. Quickly and quietly Annie stepped behind the hangings and looked out of the window—it was the same from which Mrs. Berkley had seen the wandering figure. And was it a phosphoric exhalation, and a moving mist-wreath, that fitful gleam of light—that something tall and grey on which the dense fog seemed to close the next moment?—No. There was a footfall, heavy but swift, going down the

avenue, and away to the park gate. It must have been a policeman with a concealed lantern. Nobody but herself had noticed it, and what was the use of frightening the women? Annie took another look at Jessie's face. The distortion had passed away and left it calm, and even smiling. She was breathing low now, as if in a tranquil sleep, and things might go better than one imagined; so Annie sat down in the easy-chair, feeling much worn, and dropped asleep herself.

The hours passed, and faint and slowly struggling through the heavy mist came the dawn of the morning which Christian men have hailed as that of the world's redemption—in whose early dimness the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem heard angels singing of peace on earth and goodwill towards men; and yet for nearly nineteen centuries the world has gone on pretty much as it did before, and the morning still dawns on homes like Castleford Hall. In the pale, cold light of that misty morning Annie started up, for she heard her name called, loud enough to wake the woman too—and there was Jessie getting out of bed, it seemed with joyful alacrity! “Annie,” she said, “I must see how my white lustring fits me. Tell Betty to bring it up—it will never do to have an ill-fitting dress at one's wedding. I'll warrant Herbert is up—he's sure to rise early to-day. How handsome he will look in that satin vest and sky-blue coat of his! Who are those women? I didn't know my aunt kept so many servants. But, to be sure, they will be wanted to get ready the wedding-breakfast. She won't call it *déjeûné*. My aunt Scott is quite of the old school; but a good soul—isn't she, Annie?”



The fits of the previous night had not been half so terrible to see as was Jessie's smiling and talking in that fashion about her far past and luckless wedding-day, which, somehow, had come back and fixed itself on her shattered mind—for shattered it was, Annie knew, by the settled look of simple, smiling vacancy—the eyes were not wild, the talk was not wandering, it went on in a steady stream, but all about Selkirk Cottage, her aunt Scott, Herbert, to whom she was about to be married, and the accessories of her wedding-day, which had dawned upon her with that unlucky Christmas. Shocked and frightened, Annie tried to speak to her of her illness, and persuade her to get into bed; the poor woman to whom she had been a kind mistress assisted, and none of them could keep back the tears; but Jessie did not see them. Why should she lie down, she was well enough—never so well in all her life—it was her wedding morning, and she must fit on her white lustring before Herbert came. Doctor Adams was called; he stood and looked at her a few minutes before he came forward, and Annie knew from the dismayed expression of his face what the doctor's conclusions were; but he said the nervous system had suffered a great shock, and might not recover for some time; it was, perhaps, a merciful dispensation to spare her the knowledge and grief of present circumstances—they must not attempt to contradict or set her right, it would only aggravate the derangement of mind which he hoped would gradually pass away, as her nerves recovered their tone; he would stay in the house that day, and take what measures he could. So they humoured and soothed poor Jessie, and got her to lie

down again, on the persuasion that it was too early to try on the lustring yet; but she could not sleep, and kept talking on in the same gentle, happy vein, for hours, never diverging from the wedding-day, Herbert, her aunt Scott, and her old home in Bury. At times, a glimmering of previous troubles seemed to come back upon her. "You know," she would say, "that Harriet Windham imagined she was his wife. Herbert made believe to marry her just for a sham, to pacify the spiteful old creature—you see she is related to all those Windhams in the walled-up vault, and they would have annoyed us; but we have got above them all; Herbert did it—he is so clever, and we'll be married to-day!"

When the day advanced, they brought her child to her. The fright had made little impression on the boy, only he looked paler and more peevish than ever. The doctor stood by to see the effect; he had hoped something from it, but Jessie looked at her once treasured darling as if she had never seen him before, and inquired, "Where did that queer-looking child come from?"

"Missus, dear, it's Master Herbert Windham," said poor Betsy Collins, her tears dropping fast on the boy's thin, flaxen hair.

"Oh! it's Harriet's!" said Jessie; "and just like her, so thin and ill-natured; take it away, my aunt don't like children, and that cross thing would give such trouble at the wedding-breakfast!"

The doctor shook his head, and motioned Betsy away with the boy, now whimpering and hiding his face in her breast; it seemed his mother looked as

strange to him as he had looked to her wandering senses. There was then a long talk between Doctor Adams and Mrs. Berkley in the library ; when it was over the old lady said to Annie, " My dear, we must do what we can to keep poor Jessie quiet, and leave the rest to time. Her married life has been strangely troubled ; I don't think her mind was ever a strong one, and, to my certain knowledge, she had grown timid and nervous before that fearful adventure in the back passage ; it has evidently upset her brain, and whether the balance will ever be restored or not, Doctor Adams says he cannot tell, but it is his opinion, and I think it is a rational one, that any interference, medical or otherwise, would only increase the evil, and perhaps turn her harmless, happy illusions into frenzy ; it is a fearful case, Annie, one can't say what part of it is the worst, but we must do our duty, and stand by our unfortunate relations."

Much as she had dreaded the evil day of discovery, now that it had come with unanticipated horrors, in the midst of her grey hairs and failing strength, the steady brain and clear understanding of old Seldon's eldest daughter stood firmly out against it. A fair though sad example of the insufficiency of human prudence had her whole life been ; it is strong minds only that learn the strength of fate.

So the Christmas which was to have been kept in the good old fashion passed at Castleford Hall—its master under arrest for a capital crime—its mistress frightened into hopeless insanity. They carried away the gathered holly, and left it in heaps in the park, where poor cottagers children found it withered and dry in the following

spring, and carried it home to make their evening fires. There were no chimes rung at Castleford church, the sexton being otherwise engaged. The Reverend Pilgrim read the service, but could not preach—the school children stumbled in the Christmas anthem, and the parishioners stood in the fog, which never cleared that day, talking of the terrible news they had heard from the Hall servants. Without and within it was a day of gloom. Annie had passed through some hard trials, young as she was; but the soothing, humouring, and listening to poor Jessie seemed the weariest work that had ever come across her; and, though harmless and manageable in every other respect, the unlucky second Mrs. Herbert had taken a fancy to her early friend, far stronger than she ever shewed in her unclouded days, and would scarce let Annie Hope out of her sight. They watched her, they soothed her, and the weary day went on; but its evening brought Miss Scott and the Maypole. Being the nearest, Selkirk Cottage got the news first. Time had wrought no change on the climbing roses without and the neatness within, except that the one had grown higher and the other more precise. The Maypole had begun to bend a little downwards—her mistress required a longer trumpet now. They had both eschewed the Hall ever since the tales of terror began to be whispered—maid and mistress were too firm in the faith of ghosts to venture on visiting a place said to be haunted; but when she had read Annie's letter, and sat for some minutes thinking of her duty in the case, the brave old Scotchwoman said, "Dry your eyes, Betty; it is a fearful happening, and nothing but shame and sorrow to all that belong to them can ever

come out of it; but my niece is in sore extremity—it may be in her last sickness, which should not be lamented, if it be the Maker's will to call her now; and I must go to do an aunt's part by her. I don't ask you to go with me—the meeting with that which has frightened my niece into fits is not to be lightly hazarded."

"But, with your leave, I'll go, ma'am," said Betty. "Who would see your posset made and your linen aired if I warn't there? I'll take the Bible you gave me at the Sunday school twenty-seven years ago, for knowin' who Moses's mother was, put it under my pillow every night and say my prayers—with the help of Providence, I'm afeard of nothin' then. You'll not go without me, ma'am?—is it your black trunk or your brown one that I'll pack?"

"The black one, Betty—it is the most suitable for such a journey."

The black trunk was packed, the journey was posted, and they arrived in the evening. At first, their coming was a great relief to Mrs. Berkley and Annie—there was somebody more to help and to consult with. But the appearance of her aunt wrought no change on Jessie's illusion—it seemed rather to confirm the impression of the wedding-day—and the poor old lady, with all her sense and firmness, had come to an emergency for which she had no qualifications. The greater part of Jessie's talk escaped her. As she was neither frantic nor fierce, Miss Scott considered her mind could not be so far disturbed, and proposed, as the best and most reliable remedy, to read the Bible, and some sermon-books she had brought, aloud to her niece. The process was tried—it is needless to say—without success; and

after that, Miss Scott knew not what to do. Doctor Adams knew not what to do either, but he talked of time and the nervous system, advised them to keep Jessie perfectly quiet, and went home to a family party he always had on Christmas evening. The Leitons came up to see if she was better. They had written to three lawyers, who used to attend their parties in Saville Row, to defend their innocent brother, and Heaven would reward them—the poor souls did not know that two of these legal gentlemen were dead, and the other transported for forgery years before. They also made a Christmas dinner for Herbert, took it in the carriage to Colchester, and cried over him. The policeman thought the scene quite affecting, and no doubt it was. The *Colchester Chronicle* reported it with sympathetic comments, and also informed the anxious public that the police inspector had assured them Mr. Leiton would be treated with every consideration, and that their brother had desired them not to mind him, but look after Jessie. The sight of Herbert's sisters made no difference in her speculations. She talked to them about the wedding, advised them what dresses they should wear, and warned them not to tell Harriet Windham. They wanted to explain everything to her, and when that would not be allowed, they sent for the Reverend Pilgrim. His panacea was the evening service, which he read—it may be hoped to the edification of the assembled household—poor Jessie responding most devoutly, but it was to the Marriage Service, of which she had a singularly clear recollection; and Miss Scott—though the obnoxious liturgy could not offend her ears—appeasing

her Dissenting conscience with Durham on the 119th Psalm.

Thus the day passed, and the next was like it. Herbert Leiton was committed to Colchester Castle. His house was settling down into the new state of things, as houses will do, whatever becomes of their masters. A respectable-looking, hard-faced woman, called Sarah Sutton, whom Doctor Adams recommended as sober, trustworthy, and accustomed to such cases, was brought from Colchester to take care of Jessie. The Doctor himself came and shook his head, said they must hope for the best, and sent anodynes—for she was troubled with that strange wakefulness which always keeps the shattered brain from rest. Annie had grown wakeful, too. In spite of watching and exertion, the girl started in her bed at every sound. So it happened that in the dim, cold morning, a voice, uttering her own name in the hall below, made her spring up, fling on her morning-dress, and hurry down—to meet her father at the foot of the stair.

“Annie, my own Annie! thank God that you are safe and well, in the midst of this fearful business!” he said, clasping her to his breast. “I have posted night and day, since I heard of it, to see how things went with my girl. People are always selfish, Annie; but get me some breakfast, if you can, for I must see Herbert, and then go back to Liverpool as fast as post-horses can take me. My friend’s business is left without a head. I know it is solvent, but every unreasonable creature is pressing on it with bills and accounts now, and I must keep it clear for poor Madame’s sake.”

“Sit down, papa dear,” said Annie, leading him into

the parlour. "I'll get you breakfast in a minute; but you won't think of going back to Liverpool to-day."

How pale and fagged he looked!

"I will, Annie, the moment I leave Herbert. The interest of my friend's wife is at stake, and his own mercantile honour, which I know Le Fort valued. What if he did not commit them to me in so many words—he had no time for it, no knowledge that he was going on the last journey when he stepped over that ship's side—the care equally devolves on me for friendship's sake. If anything went wrong in my absence, what account should I give him when we meet again? Things are in such a state that every hour off the spot is dangerous, and you would not have me to fail in my trust."

"No, papa, you'll go back if you think it right," said Annie, and she hurried out to get his breakfast; for there was nobody up but herself and the housemaid. When it was ready, they sat down together; and the meal was a sad one. Hope asked, and his daughter related, as far as she knew them, the particulars of Leiton's case.

"Oh! Annie, it is a bad one. And that sight you saw at your bed-room door. I shouldn't have believed it from anybody else. But I know my girl is given to neither fibs nor fancies. I fear Herbert is guilty. But we are his relations, and if he can be saved, it is our interest as well as our duty. I have written to Vasey to undertake the case. If any man can get Herbert off, he will; and from what he has said, as well as done, I believe Barrett Vasey will do his best for our sakes. He is in Ireland now, but has promised handsomely,



and sent me a letter of introduction to the governor of the gaol. It seems he is an old Dublin acquaintance of his. Besides, I am Herbert's cousin. But, oh! Annie, it breaks my heart to think of poor Jessie frightened out of her reason; and, under the circumstances, one doesn't know whether to pray for her recovery or not. If he is condemned, it is better she should never know it, but keep on thinking of her wedding-day in Bury. What a wicked spirit that woman must have been, or become, to do such great and such useless mischief! There must be truth in those old tales about people getting into the service of the King of Evil. I should not like you to leave her if you could, Annie; but tell me, fairly and honestly, are you afraid to stay?"

"Not a bit, papa. I have a good conscience and a trust in God. I never did the woman wrong, and if she appears to me again, with His help, I'll speak to her and ask her why she haunts the house."

"Well resolved, my brave girl. Stay, then, and God will bless you, and give you strength for whatever may happen. I'll go up and see her now when she sleeps—it will not disturb her; and then you will kiss me, and let me go to see poor Herbert, and get back to Liverpool."

They went up and looked at Jessie where she lay in that deep, sound sleep which, however restless through the night, always fell upon her towards morning; and her guardian, Mrs. Sutton, availed herself of the fact, for she was blowing the trumpet of Somnus mightily in the next room. Annie thought her early friend looked wan and worn to a degree she had not observed before. But the cloud of care and disquiet which had settled on

her face in latter years was gone, and in its place a simple, childlike expression had come back, as if from earlier and happier days.

"She will neither recover nor live long, Annie," said Hope, as he dashed away some large tears and softly closed the door. "The sleeping face tells us more than the waking one as regards both past and future. How much her look now reminds me of what she was when I brought her and you, then mere children, to this old house on our first visit, and Jessie wanted her supper from that terrible Miss Law."

"I remember it well, papa. Who could have thought of all that has happened since within the same four walls?"

"Nobody, child. These houses of ours witness strange things in the currents of life that pass through them."

"Do the Monros know it, papa?—did they get my letter?"

"They did, Annie, and are coming—father, mother, and sister Martha. They will be here to-morrow or next day."

"They do not travel as quickly as you, papa."

"No, Annie; they are coming to look after their fifth daughter, and I came to see about my only one."

Was this the man old Johnstone said was not her father? There was no time for that long, strange story now. Annie put it aside once more, and asked,

"Shall I tell Mrs. Berkley and Miss Scott that you are here?"

"No, Annie, there is no use in disturbing the old

ladies, for I cannot stay to talk. When the Monros come, a sad coming it is to them, poor people, for Jessie was their pride—at least she has been since she got married. They were never done talking of Mrs. Herbert Leiton and Castleford Hall. Between ourselves, Annie, there was more pride than affection in it. The family have a good deal of Scottish coldness, and that will save them now. But the time is going,” said Hope, looking at his watch, and stretching out the other arm to his daughter. It was the injured one, and had now a strip of crape bound round it, in the old French fashion of mourning, for his friend. Yet it rejoiced Annie’s heart to see how well he could stretch it out and clasp her round the waist.

“Can’t you sit a few minutes yet, papa?”

“No, darling, I cannot. But listen to me. Keep your good and brave resolution, and stay with Jessie while you can be of use or comfort to her. When Vasey comes tell him all you know, and do whatever he bids you. He is one man on whom we can depend. I’ll go by the London coach at one, for I have some business in the city, and I’ll try to call on poor Susan. She will have heard the report, and be in a sad way. Good-bye, my daughter!—my consolation! I’ll tell Henry and Desmond all about you. You would be proud to see what fine boys they are growing. Good-bye, love. Let me go.”

Annie loosened her arms from her father’s neck. She saw him run down the avenue, and jump into the gig that waited for him, with something like his former activity. In a minute more he was out of sight behind the tall trees, and nobody but herself and the housemaid knew that he had come and gone.

The ancient castle of Colchester, which Sir Charles Lucas and his colleagues so gallantly defended against the Parliamentary army in 1648, paying for their courage and loyalty with their lives when the place was won by famine, had been for many a year before the time of our story converted into a county gaol. Old buildings, like old families, are apt to lose their status. The castle is still the stronghold of Essex justice. The county magistrates meet for the despatch of business in its banquetting hall, which also serves a local book-club by way of library. Its chapel has become the armoury of the county militia, and its ground-floor has been grated and celled, to form what Howard would have called a very commodious prison. Moreover, it stands in the parish of All Saints—a singular locality for a gaol—and the traveller who passes from the High Street of the thriving country town into the retired green close or bailey in which it stands, will mark its solid square keep, the remnants of towers that yet flank its angles, the Norman arch above its gate, and its walls—on which the leather cannon of the Parliamentarians could make no impression—thirty feet thick at the base and eleven at the summit, of mingled Roman brick and stone. In one of the prison-rooms made in that thick wall, a cell furnished with more than usual attention to the occupant's comfort—for he was a country squire, and his sisters had exerted their interest on that subject—it was within their comprehension—sat Herbert Leiton at a small table writing a letter, when the turnkey knocked civilly, and ushered in Henry Hope. The pen dropped from Herbert's hand as he looked up and recognized his cousin, and the composure enlarged on by the *Colches-*

*ter Chronicle* at once forsook him. He tried to speak, but only gasped.

"It's I, Herbert," said Hope. He had prepared himself for the interview, shook the hand which Herbert had not extended, took the second chair, and sat down.

"I didn't expect to see you here—to see anybody!" said Leiton, now fairly overcome, and crying like one of his sisters.

"Not expect to see me, Herbert? But for the loss of my friend I should have come to spend Christmas at your house, and why should I not come to see you here?"

"Oh, Hope! if I had taken your advice I never should have been here. You said that evil reports would cling to me and mine for marrying as I did, and so they have—evil reports and evil things that will bring me to the gallows. And if it were not for the shame of it, Hope, I shouldn't care to die after what has happened. Oh! my poor mother and sisters! Oh! my poor Jessie!" and the man sobbed and cried like a child.

"Courage, Herbert! It has not come to the last yet. I have come here to talk about your defence. There are nearly three months between this and the Lent Assizes, and I want you to put your case into the hands of the most honest and able lawyer I know—Barrett Vasey, the man who did me such good service in the Insolvent Court."

"Ah! Hope, I didn't stand by you then as I ought to have done," said Herbert, sobering out of that paroxysm of grief, "but I couldn't help it. I never stood well with the bank people. I'm sure they hate

me. They had found out Spyers' business just then. It was my name that was forged to the bills, and though they could prove nothing against me, I don't know what they suspected. The fault was not being straightforward and above-board with you. I should have told you everything, but I couldn't, Hope. It was always my way to keep a fair face, and hide whatever people might remark on. And now, see what I have made of it! Do you think Barrett would defend me honestly?"

"I'm sure of it, Herbert. I could pledge my life and honour for the man."

"He served you well, I know. I suppose he is a friend of yours; and you're the next heir to Castleford, cousin." Leiton's eyes dropped to the ground as he spoke; but Hope looked at him with a calm, clear glance—perhaps there was a touch of pride and scorn in it, as there had been long ago, when they chanced to meet that evening in the Lover's Bower.

"After you and your son, Herbert."

"My son will never live to inherit," said Leiton, in a sort of whisper.

"Well, that is all to be proved. In the meantime it is because I happen to be the next heir, and your relation, that I am anxious about your defence; and if I could not trust Vasey for myself, I would not trust him for you."

Leiton stretched across the small table and grasped his hand.

"Will you stand by me, Hope—a suspected, a miserable man, who did not stand by you?"

"I will, Herbert, do everything in my power—travel

any distance—take any pains. If I had property, it would be at your service. As it is, I know that Vasey will serve you for my sake. But, Herbert, we are alone here—remember it will make no difference in my efforts to save you. My honour, and that of my family, are involved; but tell me, before God, who is now our only witness, and shall be our judge”—his grasp tightened on Herbert's hand—“tell me if you are guilty of the crime laid to your charge, or not?”

They were looking each other full in the face, but Leiton spoke calmly and distinctly. There was no change of colour, no faltering of the eye, as he said—

“Before God, Hope, I am not guilty of the woman's death. I am guilty of wishing for it—you know why; and she haunts my house.” The man spoke with a shudder, and his eyes almost closed in the terror of that fearful remembrance. “It is no servants' story, though we tried to say so. I saw her myself, and she has frightened Jessie out of her senses. But, Hope, I did not murder her. On that horrid birth-day I found that she had opened a desk of mine and read Jessie's letters—the stone of her ring was lying among them—and you know how foolish we had been. I got desperate about the business, and set off like a fool to walk to Bury, and see the old place where we used to meet. Before I had gone half-way my senses returned, and I walked back in time to receive the company. You know how she was missed, how we found the bonnet, and how we found the body. It had on her clothes, Hope—I could swear to that; yet my mind misgave me that it was her. But I thought the less said the better; and I feel certain that she drowned herself after reading those

letters. That is why she haunts the house, and why I have been brought to this. You don't believe me, Hope—you think that I am guilty?"

"No, Herbert, I don't; but the circumstances are against you. You know on what evidence you have been arrested. Why did you employ Ned Coster?"

"That was another piece of hiding things from the world, Hope. The wretch came to me with a story about a skeleton he had found in Kitscove the day before Christmas Eve. I knew the talk about it would trouble Jessie, and bring up all the old reports, which I thought people were beginning to forget. So I bid him bury it quietly, and he and his daughter have turned witnesses against me. That is all I can tell you—believe me or not. Before God, I am not guilty of the actual crime," and once again Herbert Leiton looked his cousin in the face, with more courage and honesty than Hope had ever seen in the days when he thought him a lucky man.

"I believe you, Herbert," he said, "in spite of circumstances; and that belief lifts a burden from my heart. The gallows is nothing compared with the guilt—you have sinned grievously against that unhappy, unforgiving soul. But none of us know into what sins we might fall. Keep up your courage—if man can get you acquitted, Barrett Vasey will. I have travelled a long way to see you and my daughter, and must now go back to Liverpool, on account of my friend's business; but I'll come back, Herbert. And Vasey is coming. Put your case into his hands, and hide nothing from him."

"It's five minutes to one, sir," said the retained turn-



key, looking in; and with a long shake-hands the cousins parted, both looking much brighter than when they met. Yet it was worthy of note that the one left in the prison-cell had the brightening-up more decided and more lasting. When the door was closed on Herbert Leiton, he first tore to fragments the letter he had been writing to Messrs. Gilpin and Cash, his London solicitors. They were a Quaker firm, and had done Mr. Leiton's business ever since he became a man of property, but were not at all anxious to undertake his present case. Then he took a turn or two round the cell, and soon after sat down, with an almost complacent look, to the not meagre dinner prepared and sent in by his mindful sisters—poor souls, they did all they could for him. Hope, on the contrary, when he had got into the London coach between two Essex farmers, and was rattling along at the rate of ten miles an hour, looked out in the direction of the old castle as if he had yet some questions to ask there. Herbert's honest look in his face had convinced him for the time; but the circumstances of the case were condemning, and the heavy wave of doubt rolled back upon his heart.

## CHAPTER VI.

## ANNIE'S DISAPPEARANCE.

"WE have got through another day, gentlemen," Charles the Tenth was accustomed to say when taking leave for the night of his devoted and very dull courtiers at Töplitz. Though neither ex-kings nor old Legitimists, how many of us have nothing better to say of most of the days that go from us for ever!

They got through them in Castleford Hall. In due time, as people travelled then from Lancashire to Essex, Doctor Monro arrived, with his wife and eldest daughter, the yet single sister Martha, who helped them to keep the school when all the rest of their girls were married—by the way, it was generally believed they had all got off through Jessie's high match. There the pride and glory of the family had cast anchor; but this storm nearly broke their chain-cable, and it was a grievous sight to see the grey-haired old couple and the staid elder sister in such sore sorrow when they came out of Jessie's room.

Their arrival made no difference in her dream : they were coming to her wedding, as they had come years before. She wanted to know where the rest of the girls were, and why her mother came in a black gown. Honest people !—they wanted to reason with her. Mrs. Berkley had some trouble, and incurred more blame, by endeavouring to prevent them, till Doctor Adams, having got tired of shaking his head by this time, told her in confidence that it was no matter, except as regarded the patient's comfort, for there was no chance of her recovery. So they reasoned with Jessie till they became tired, and found it had no effect but to make her melancholy and fretful, because Herbert would not be in time for the ceremony. She knew it was "that Harriet Windham that kept him away." Then they tried Miss Scott's plan. Being of the same serious order, of course it was another failure, though the Monros held to it longer. They and the lady of Selkirk Cottage were of the same mind on most subjects, and Jessie's nearest relations ; it was natural they should take the principal charge of her, but it was also evident that Hope had given a correct account of the Monros.

In the midst of their pride in the alliance, they had never considered themselves properly treated by the Leitons. Mrs. Monro had a private opinion that what she called the present dispensation was a judgment on the entire family for their failure in that respect. Busy as his sisters were about Herbert, writing to everybody supposed to be a friend, preparing delicacies to enliven his prison fare, and going to see him at all hours when admission could be obtained, they also found time, as ladies generally will, to think the Monros were taking

a great deal too much upon them, to find fault with all their arrangements regarding "poor dear Jessie," and to give Mrs. Berkley and Annie little rest by constituting them both umpires in the continual controversy. But decidedly the most difficult card in this family game was played by the Reverend Pilgrim. Miss Scott and the Monros avoided his church and condemned his liturgy as the legitimate offspring of Popery, and the cause of all laxity in morals and religion. They were not sure that it had not somehow a hand in the dispensation, and thought the less Jessie saw of the reverend gentleman the better. The Leitons, on the other hand, were certain that any chance of recovery she had depended entirely on his ministrations. What opinion the Reverend Pilgrim himself entertained was never made public—nobody inquired after it. Worthy and much-disturbed man, he came to the Hall when he was sent for by the one party; he went home to his parsonage when he was bidden by the other. His spouse, of course, took part with her sisters in the feud—for such it was becoming—and the seven young Pilgrims kept well away from the Hall for fear of the ghost, or the Monros—it was not ascertained which.

The sturdy, hard-thinking Scotch character, and the grim Calvinism which made the latter a terror to the seven and their reverend sire, also enabled them to brave the fears which had long troubled the Leiton mansion. They went to bed, after their long prayers, psalm-singing, and chapter-reading, without a light burning in their rooms. They traversed the stairs and passages, when occasion required, long after nightfall, without hesitation or tremour that any eye could note—not

that they doubted the tales which had reached them in their distant homes. The Scotch mind is too intellectual and imaginative to disbelieve in apparitions; it naturally clings to the might and mystery of old legendary lore. But there is something in the strong thought and stern theology that flourish north of the Tweed to make men brave even when under the influence of superstition. The Monros never disputed Harriet Windham's walking the Hall in her shroud at midnight; they had no doubt of the fact. They had no doubt of Leiton's guilt, either; but they kept their convictions close among themselves, and the very servants who had seen their mistress frightened into insanity, and their master arrested for the murder, not only kept their places in the house, but went about their work with less fear and trembling under the Monros' administration.

One circumstance greatly assisted in this general confidence. From the fatal Christmas eve which brought such ruin with its fall, no sight or sound of the restless spirit was heard or seen in Castleford Hall. Even Miss Law made no allusions to it now; but she was also little seen or heard of after the night in which her sitting-up services had been dispensed with. Miss Law kept particularly close in her own cottage; and when she did appear, the whole household remarked that her tone concerning Herbert Leiton was changed; for she asserted his innocence even to the confidential Mary Collins, who of course echoed her sentiments. Indeed, they were the general confession of everybody in and about the Hall; it was not safe to think anything else—"one might be brought up on the trial."

Yet one and all had an explanation of the first Mrs. Herbert's non-appearance, which had been promulgated by Molly Spence at one of her counter *soirées*—namely, that justice was about to be done: the murderer had been arrested in the midst of his impenitent security; and should Leiton be condemned and executed, as his tenantry and servants sincerely expected he would, the troubled spirit must retire to its final abode—by-the-bye, nobody imagined that to lie in an upward direction—and never again disturb the nights of innocent people.

Doctor Monro, the only substitute for a master the Hall could boast, had taken his title and degree from the University of Glasgow, some forty years before. In which of the two great branches of medical practice, killing and curing, or if it were in them both he had come short, was not ascertainable; but after trying it with little success, first in his native Scotland, and then in the Southern States of America, he had given up the profession for that of schoolmaster, in which the Doctor had better luck, being better qualified. He was a prosy, commonplace, and completely domesticated man, exact with all, critical in his way, and always in earnest after the main chance. He held consultations with Doctor Adams regarding his daughter, but could not be persuaded that change of air and scene might be tried with advantage. He made a circuit of the neighbouring gentry in behalf of his son-in-law, and met with a decidedly cold shoulder from most of them. After that, the Doctor set himself down to await, as he said, the will of Providence—conducted the family devotions on week-days and Sundays—gave his

casting vote in family controversies—visited Herbert every Saturday, with Baxter's Call in his pocket, and announced through Mrs. Monro—that was the Doctor's custom—that come what would, they had given up the school, and should remain at the Hall; Mr. Hope would never turn them and poor Jessie out, after all the trouble his cousin had brought upon them.

The old year went out and the new year came in—the days were beginning to lengthen—Annie was growing tired of listening to poor Jessie, and still more of the Leitons and the Monros. So was Mrs. Berkley, and, after a day of more than usual debate, in the early part of January, she asked Annie into her room, where the old lady was going to take her sleep, as she had done on Christmas eve, and said, "My dear, I am going home, my carriage is ordered, Fritchine will pack up to-morrow, and I advise you to come with me. We can do no good here, these people can dispute very well without us; and though Jessie clings to you because you neither cross nor set her right, she will very soon forget and take to somebody else. Her mind is settling down, I fear, into confirmed imbecility; I saw her yesterday playing with some old ribbons the nurse had given her, exactly like Herbert Windham—by the way, what a sad cough that child has got; but, Annie, dear, I'm growing sleepy—come with me, I advise you, you know you are welcome at the Villa; Susan can take care of the house in Park Place without you, and it would be lonely—think of it, my dear."

Annie promised to think, tucked the old lady in with her carriage shawl, and went down to sit alone in the library, for all the Monros were occupied with Herbert

Windham's whooping-cough, and the Leitons had retired home.

There had been a great snow-fall on the previous day; it lay white and cold on the branches of the old trees, and on the silent park; few feet came up the avenue now, but as Annie thought of writing to her father by the last glimpse of daylight, she heard a knock at the outer door, a well-known voice saying, "Never mind, I don't want to be announced, Miss Hope knows me," and with as little ceremony as he used to make his entrance in Park Place, in walked Barrett Vasey.

"You stand it wonderfully, Annie," said he, shaking hands with her—with one hand, and clapping her on the back with the other, "a sore trial it is for all who are concerned."

"But far worse for the Leitons; won't you take the case in hand, Mr. Vasey? I am so glad to see you, I thought you would never come."

"Oh! yes, I am sure to come where you are, Annie; and I have been busy about the case this fortnight, hunting up evidence, throwing out lines to hook more, and casting nets which will catch some people tripping. By-the-way, I saw your father in Liverpool, working like a Turk for Madame Le Fort; I was sorry to hear of that man's dropping off, he was a trump to your father; but Hope looked surprisingly well. You're glad to hear that, Annie, and so you may be; he would be the first man in England if estimates went by merit. I wish you had seen the letter he sent me about that featherless gander who turned his back on him when things were at the worst. He could not have been



more urgent, and I know Hope would not be half as much so if the case were his own ; but I have come on business, child—sit down here, and tell me, from beginning to end, all you know about the matter.”

Annie took the appointed chair, and proceeded with a distinct narrative of her experience and observations since she came to Castleford Hall. It reminded her of the snowy night when she sat down in the lawyer’s chambers to give him an account of her father’s affairs. Vasey did not watch or question her curiously now, but sat with a note-book and pencil, taking down what he thought necessary, till she came to the face seen at her bedroom door.

“Your father told me that, Annie, but I don’t know whether to believe it or not ; are you sure it was not a trick of your imagination ?”

“I am certain it was not, sir, for I was thinking of nothing of the kind.”

“Then are you sure that it was not some person trying to frighten you ?”

“I knew the first Mrs. Herbert’s face as well as I know yours, and it was herself, exactly like what she might be now, for I can declare that the hair was greyer, and the face more wrinkled.”

Was Mr. Vasey himself frightened, that he started up with such a strange, bewildered look, took a rapid turn round the library, and then came back to his chair, saying,

“Well, child ?”

“For goodness’ sake, Mr. Vasey, what are you thinking of ? Did you see her, too ?” said poor Annie.

"No, child, I didn't; and if I did I shouldn't know her. What I was thinking of I can't tell you. There are thoughts that come into the brain so vague and indefinite that, if expressed in words, they would seem preposterous, if not insane. Proceed, Annie."

Annie went on, and the solicitor sat quietly taking notes, and asking a question now and then; but when she related the conversation overheard in the park, he pointed his pencil at her, saying—

"Look, Annie, there were more than you listening that day in the clump of firs. What fools people are to talk in such places! I could never make out before what that wasp Katy Coster meant by telling a man I sent to her, in the character of a London reporter, 'that there was a very genteel lady, and a near relation to Mither Leiton, that knowed her father's story to be true, and would be had up for evidence.' The women's tongues for ever! But she's cunning, and well put up to it. No endeavour of mine or anybody I sent could get her back to the genteel lady. That was you, Annie. Katy was hidden somewhere to be 'vidence' for her father, and they'll summon you, child. Your position and character would make any confirmatory evidence they could get out of you conclusive to the jury."

"But am I obliged to appear against my father's cousin?"

"If you are summoned you must appear, child; in which case there are two choices for you—either to perjure yourself, or help to get Leiton condemned. What you have just told me would weigh heavily with any jury, and the counsel for the prosecution would be

certain to make the most of it. It's a deep-laid plot, Annie; but I know who is at the bottom of it. I know also that there is a clue would lead out of the labyrinth, if one could only find it."

"Do you think there is anybody plotting against Herbert, sir? What interest could they have?"

"Annie, there never has been a case pushed on as this has been without somebody's interest. I know who it is: not your father, though he is the next heir to Castleford, and is moving heaven and earth to save the man who stands between him and it. I know what you're going to say—who would see their cousin executed for the sake of property? I tell you, child, there are highly-respectable and very pious people who would drive a sly nail into his gallows for half your father's chance, and be in a state of despair for three weeks after the execution."

"Do you think Herbert is not guilty?" said Annie, with a kind of vague hope, in spite of all she had heard and seen.

"I think he is not guilty as principal in the act. Remember, I don't say he has not a guilty knowledge of it; but it is not Leiton's character to commit a determined and desperate crime, however he might have wished to get rid of the woman. Somebody has done it for him."

"Is not that the same thing?" said Annie.

"Yes, if he actually employed them, which I don't think Leiton would venture on, either."

"He denied all knowledge of it to my father."

"Yes, Annie; that's like the Irish song—

'Tim swore by the great, and Tim swore by the small,  
That he never was guilty of nothin' at all.'

If denials amounted to anything in the shape of evidence, no man should ever have been hanged. There is a clue, if I could find the thread. But to return to your part of the business. You must get out of the way, child. It may look ill, but it is the best thing we can do. I know a famous place in Yorkshire, and a safe one in every respect. I would send you nowhere else, Annie."

"I'm sure you would not, sir; and my father bade me do whatever you wanted."

"He was right there, and the sooner you go the better, before they summon you; it would be too late then. You tell me Mrs. Berkley is going home—just pack up, Annie, and go with her. I'll send old Watson to meet you at the Villa, and take you straight to Moorside—he'll say to your father in Liverpool, for the edification of Mrs. Berkley's servants. Watson's as safe as a church, and as old as the most of them. It's rather a lonely, out-of-the-way place I'm sending you to."

"Oh, sir, I'm not afraid of a lonely place."

"No, Annie, you have too much spirit for that, and anything is better than appearing against your father's cousin."

"Oh, sir, I would go anywhere, and do anything, rather than appear against Herbert."

"Well done, Annie. But, go on; tell me what happened to Jessie on Christmas eve. You were in the house."

Annie told him all she knew. It was getting dark by this time, but the solicitor rose once more, and walked up and down the library.

"Annie," said he, "I don't know what to make of the ghost business. I never pinned my faith to any story of the kind; when well investigated, they mostly turn out impositions, or the fancy of frightened fools. Not that I think apparitions impossible things—it would be hard to say what is impossible; but nothing like this ever happened in my experience. I have heard it from dozens of people all in their senses, as the world goes, and with no reason for fibbing. Leiton himself told me he had seen her, and so did you, Annie; but poor Jessie has got the worst of it. If all be true, that woman must have grown a demon by this time; but I have known them bad enough for that walking in flesh and blood. She must be dead, I suppose."

Vasey was talking in the deep darkness which now filled the room, except where a reflection of the white moonlight, shining on the snow outside, crept coldly in through the uncurtained window, and showed Annie the dim outline of his figure.

"She must be dead, and Leiton knows it; but those are not her bones," he continued, as if summing up the matter to himself.

"Shall I ring for candles, sir?" said Annie.

"Oh! yes, child, get the lights; I forgot it is a custom of mine to think and speculate in the dark—I don't know why, but there is something in it that clears a man's intellects; I have made out things at night that had set my wits a wool-gathering all the day before. Get

the lights, and get me some supper, Annie. I shall be here off and on for some time, but neither the servants nor anybody else must know that I am Leiton's lawyer, till you're safe in Yorkshire; I'm a friend of your father's, remember, come to settle some business with you—you might give them to understand it was something about an old uncle's will, and mention as many thousands as you like."

"There is no use in telling fibs, sir, if one can help it," said Annie.

"No, not exactly; but it would be a fine opportunity if you were inclined that way. At anyrate, your father sent me, and you're going home with Mrs. Berkley; you may tell her why, she is a sensible woman, and that's not a common article," said Vasey, falling to the tray which the butler brought in, with the earnestness of a man whose fast had been long and his travel far. The supper was quickly got through—"That's a glass of good wine, any way," said he; "Herbert had always taste, whatever else he wanted; it's a pity Jack Ketch should get him, but he shan't if I can help it. Such a puzzle never came across me, and I have had some deep cases in my time, but I'll get to the bottom of it, if money or searching can do it," and the fiery energy of his nature flashed in Vasey's dark eyes—it was but for an instant; the next he leant back on his chair with crossed arms, and Annie could see by the better light that he looked terribly tired. She had been making up her mind to speak to him of old Johnstone, but this was no time for it.

"I'm used up, Annie," he said, in reply to her look—words were not always requisite with Vasey; "I'm

used up, and must go to bed ; can you get me a room here?—by-the-bye, I must go off early in the morning, and you must be off as soon as you can, so I had better tell you about Moorside. It's a sort of half-inn, half-farm-house, standing on the old North road, in former times the accredited way from York to Scotland. They say Sir Robert Kerr, when spurring north to tell King James the joyful news of Queen Elizabeth's decease, drank a horn of home-brewed there, and would not wait for the change of his angel. A century after, the stage-coach which went from London to Edinburgh in a fortnight, D.V., lumbered that way, and stopped at the 'Moorside Inn,' but few travellers go by it now, except gentlemen who have reasons for getting privately to Scotland, and couples in more than common fear of stoppage in their course to Gretna Green. I know the landlady well, for I was her legal adviser. Annie, there is nobody gets such an opportunity of knowing people to the root as a gentleman in that capacity. She came from Scotland in quality of a servant-maid, I believe, in a farming family, from whom she flitted to the 'Moorside Inn;' in process of time, married old Grimshaw, its master, who, at his decease, left her house and land, by a will which his relations, with whom he had not exchanged a word for twenty years—those Yorkshire people are famous quarrellers—endeavoured to break, but I'm thankful to say they couldn't. I had done some business for Grimshaw in my time, and was at York then, so the widow employed me, and we carried the day. Annie, she's an upright, honest woman, rather fussy about scouring and scrubbing, gifted with a bit of a temper, and desperately strict

notions of propriety. She has no children, and is always wanting a young woman to be her sub, and inherit the plate and linen, for the house and land the honest creature has made over to the Grimshaws, by a testament which they are not to hear of till her death. I sent her no less than six from different counties, but she sent them all home in succession, for looking at the farmers and cattle-dealers who stopped there, on their way to Glossop market. You are not going in that character, but as a niece of mine, a young lady for whom I want a country residence, till I can find her a situation. I'll get a name for you, and send it by Watson. Mind, no going to see how Susan and the old man get on, in Park Place, before you start; that would be sure to give the business wind; I'll look after them myself, and explain things to your father. You'll be safe at Moorside, and make yourself useful to the old woman. I'll write to her all that is necessary; I know she'll be kind to you—I know, too, that she will never have cause to find fault with Hope's daughter, as she did with the six; but get me a room, child, for I must go to bed."

Annie saw his room prepared, and Vasey's parting words were an exhortation to get off quickly. Before she retired, the Monros were told all that was requisite about her father's friend, and her own determination to go home with Mrs. Berkley, at which the excellent people affected to be surprised and vexed; but Annie was aware that the old lady's departure, and probably her own, appeared in the light of a special deliverance. Miss Scott said they were quite right to go, it was a sad place for a young person, and quite as bad for a



fashionable lady like Mrs. Berkley; she would go home herself, only it was her duty to remain. And "Oh! Miss," said the Maypole, on the stair, "ain't it a pity she thinks so, for our parsley 'll be perished with the frost; but in course duty must be done."

Mrs. Berkley was privately enlightened on the subject, and proved a capital ally. Annie must go with her to the Villa, at least till the trial was over—she would feel so lonely and nervous.

Early next morning Vasey was off. Annie got up just in time to see him running down the avenue. In the course of the forenoon the carriage arrived—the trunks were packed—the Monros told them how sorry they were—the Leitons expressed almost as much regret (with them it was real, for they were losing their referees). They went with them in procession to take a parting look at poor Jessie. Mrs. Berkley warned them to let her know nothing of Annie's going—but the precaution was unnecessary. Jessie scarcely noticed anybody now—her mind was sliding down even from the wedding—she did not appear to be conscious of their presence—paid no attention to Annie, who tried to talk to her about the weather and the snow; but sat all the time smiling to herself and playing with the old ribbons, which Mrs. Sutton said were her only diversion. Bound as she was for the heart of the Yorkshire moors, Annie felt that Providence had done something for her, when they had got fairly out of the park gate, and Mary Collins could be seen at her lodge window, looking mournfully after the carriage. To leave that dreary house, with its terrible memories, poor Jessie's twaddle, and the paltry contentions of her friends, would have

been a relief under any circumstances ; but now, when she could not walk the village street without being stared at by inquirers, and tattled about by the inhabitants as the young lady who was visiting at the Hall, and must be up to everything—when, moreover, there was a certainty of being summoned to corroborate the Costers' evidence, Annie would have gone to the strictest nunnery that ever was barred against the world and its vanities. It was also a relief to the girl's mind that Jessie did not miss her now—she could not have gone in peace had the poor stricken heart clung to her as it once did.

They were talking of that, and what a blessing it was that her derangement had not taken the melancholy turn. "It very seldom does when caused by fright, Annie," said Mrs. Berkley. "I knew a man who lost his reason by being brought too near the guillotine in the French Revolution, and he went the very same way." Annie heard the beginning, but not the end of the old lady's reminiscence. The carriage was just getting out of Castleford street—the road was narrow there—and a gig, bound for the village, would have come in collision with it, if the driver had not been warned by the gentleman in occupation. But she had peeped through the closely-curtained window at the sound of his voice—for that gentleman was Simon Frazer.

"Are we safe, my dear?" said Mrs. Berkley, not taking the trouble to look.

"Oh, yes—quite safe," said Annie ; and she thought, What on earth is taking him to Castleford ? Perhaps Mr. Leslie owns part of the paper-mill—perhaps he is Mr.

Leslie's son-in-law now—what business is that of mine ? No doubt he is congratulating himself on having given up our acquaintance in time before this shocking trial." So the gig dashed by one way, and the carriage rolled on another.

## CHAPTER VII.

## SIMON ON ANOTHER TACK.

To understand the wind which blew Simon to Castleford the very day and hour in which Annie left it, it is necessary to return to the Frazer family at that period of their history when the overtures from Piccadilly had been discussed and rejected. The poverty of the manse was not lightened by that transaction, but it made the Frazers understand each other better, and drew the always harmonious family closer together. Even Andrew was taken into the privy-council, and gave in his conscientious adhesion to the new policy, though not without a sigh for Glasgow College, and the kirk which might have been had. The minister preached and argued on with his disputatious flock. Mrs. Frazer returned to her economising with double care, and talked of finding a better place for Bell Buchanan, who, being by this time tired of the Lent broth and the unextractable teapot, was willing to flit from the manse. As for Simon, he went about his business as if nothing

had happened, except that his saving became more rigid. People found out that he was a bit of a screw in consequence, and made private remarks on the tendencies of Scotland. Mr. Leslie made remarks of another kind. He could not understand the lad's backwardness—it seemed superfluous modesty, after Miss Sibyl's mission and his own corroborative hints; for Mr. Leslie would as soon have thought of his Jacob staff refusing to stand where he placed it, as of the poor minister's son turning his back on such an opportunity. Miss Jemima consented to come home on the strength of the new treaty. The symptoms of the brain-fever disappeared with great celerity when its provisions were made known to her. It was plain to herself and satellites that she could not be wanted in Piccadilly. Home she came in her triumphal chariot, *alias* carriage, attended by Sarah Ann; and mistress and maid resumed their ancient state. The latter was, forthwith, sent to inform James Alston of the fact, and also that Miss Leslie advised him not to come near the house, as her father would certainly kill him; and she knew he would not endanger his life for her. Then there were extensive orders given to the milliner and dressmaker; but no going to the kirk or manse in London Wall. Miss Leslie had been courted of late, and, like the tiger which has tasted blood, her vanity could dispense with that luxury no more. Besides, the lady rather hoped than believed in Simon's coming round to woo. His backward start and look at that momentous supper, and the spiteful hints dropped by Mr. Johnstone on Thundering Monday, convinced her that his heart had gone after Annie Hope, and could not be brought back again,

though she kept up the comedy by assuring Jones that her father need not attempt to force her into a marriage with that conceited creature, because he was a minister's son, and had come from Scotland; for she would never give her hand without her heart—and that did not belong to Simon Frazer. In the meantime, Simon was invited twice to dinner and three times to tea; but, mindful of an earlier invitation, he found excuses for declining, and went home to his father's meagre board with a brave heart, but a sad one—for Simon was Mr. Leslie's assistant. He knew the family must eventually perceive that he was keeping his distance. And what family could forgive such a slight?

Simon did not reckon wide of the mark. There was one in the Leslie household who could not help seeing how the case stood. Miss Sibyl had witnessed the scene in the back drawing-room. She could see no sign of the expected snapping now, and felt not only her family, but her personal dignity, involved. Had she not been envoy-extraordinary to the manse? And what did the Frazers mean by keeping off so quietly? Did they dare to slight her cousin's daughter? Miss Sibyl's wrath boiled high and hot at the bare suspicion. Moreover, she was puzzled as well as angry. The good woman's calculations—the experience, the wisdom, the reckoning of her entire life—were set at nought and utterly ignored by the behaviour of the minister's son. Had the Frazers got intimation of a coming legacy from some rich and hitherto unknown relative? Had some wealthy widow, or well-portioned maiden, taken notice of Simon on his engineering travels? Woman's curiosity and woman's wrath could wait no longer for a

solution of the problem ; and on the Monday after Simon had sent his last apology—it was always a favourite day in Miss Sibyl's calendar—she took no trouble to send a messenger before her—did not even put on her Sunday shawl and bonnet—but, issuing forth as if bound for the butcher's or the fishmonger's, Mr. Leslie's busy cousin made her way to London Wall, on a cold, raw morning, and put Mrs. Frazer in a terrible hurry to make herself presentable to the unexpected visitor.

The minister's wife had more to trouble her on the occasion than getting out of the kitchen and putting on her tabinet. She had not spoken of it even to the Reverend Cameron ; but she had lived in dread and fear of what might happen to Simon when the Leslies came to consider themselves slighted ; and now she felt sure that Miss Sibyl had come in search of an explanation. But Ellen Frazer had the constancy as well as the courage of the north. Having made up her mind to the duty, she would hold by it at all hazards. Yet it was with a resolution to speak as fair as conscience would allow, and ward off the danger of Mr. Leslie's wrath from her son, that she entered the parlour and greeted Miss Sibyl. One look at that amiable lady's face showed Mrs. Frazer that she had not come to parley. Observations on the weather, remarks on coals, candles, and other themes of domestic interest, were answered with monosyllables or a nod, and a desperate plunge into kirk matters was cut short with the demand,

“Mrs. Frazer, can you tell me how is your son Simon?”

"Well, thank you, Miss Hamilton. Simon seldom complains. It's a matter of great——"

"Thankfu'ness, nae doubt," said Miss Sibyl; "but I thought somethin' maun be wrong wi' him. He could na come to dinner or tay at our 'ouse. But just let him wait till he's axed again. Mrs. Frazer, I dinna understand his conduc'. Lads hae a right to gang where they please, I'll na dispute; but ane would think there might be waur places than Mr. Leslie's for your son, after what passed between you and me at our last meetin'. Mrs. Frazer, I dinna understand it."

Mrs. Frazer had made a resolution, and was the woman to keep it; but what are human resolves against a lady determined to talk out her quarrel. Never did counsel, determined on getting evidence out of a stiff witness, work the cross-examination to half such purpose as did Miss Sibyl; and the result was that, in spite of all her endeavours to keep peace, the minister's wife was bothered, urged, taunted into anger and plain speaking.

"My son," she said, "has no affection for Miss Leslie. Her bringing up is far above his; and, from what I know of her temper and disposition, she would not make a suitable wife for Simon. They never could make a happy marriage. And, knowing that, he is perfectly right in avoiding the young lady's company. At the same time, Miss Hamilton, we are all grateful to Mr. Leslie for his good opinion of our Simon. I hope the lad will never forget how much he owes him; and I am sure Miss Leslie will get a far better husband."

"You're sure o' the deil!" cried Miss Sibyl, jumping from the chair; and the rest of her oration, being more



vigorous than elegant, need not be related *verbatim*. Suffice it to say that the entire Frazer family, and Simon in particular, were denounced in Miss Hamilton's strongest style, "for enticing an innocent lassie's heart, for listening to leein' stories, for tryin' to draw on and get mair fortune," and for a vast variety of deceitful tricks and crafty inventions. The threats with which her commination wound up were equally terrible. They began with letting the world know "what sort o' manse folk they were," and concluded with a promise of transportation for Simon, and beggary for the rest of the household. If all London Wall was not edified by her morning lecture the fault did not rest with Miss Sibyl; and after vain efforts to edge in a mollifying word, Mrs. Frazer was sincerely glad to hear the manse-door slammed, and see the wrathful representative of the Hamiltons of Musselburgh striding down the street.

The joy was of short duration. Back on the poor mother's heart, like a thunder-cloud, came the fear of Simon losing his place—now almost their only support. When it was gone, what should they do? The Reverend Cameron entered while she was yet sitting where Miss Sibyl had left her bewildered with these thoughts. He had gone that morning to visit a poor and sick parishioner. On his homeward way he was just in time to encounter Miss Sibyl; and the angry scowl and brush by, with which she responded to her once favourite minister's salutation, prepared him for the terrible report at home. He had been living in expectation of something of the kind. His helpmate and he had been playing the same game—each mind hiding its fears from the other, not to trouble it before the time. Now

the crisis had come; but the minister's heart was as high as his Calvinism. "Nelly," said he, "all these things are but trials of our faith. Godly men of old met with darker dispensations—remember Job and Daniel, and those nearer our own time who suffered for the Covenant. It is well for our weakness that we are not called to testify in like fashion. These Leslies are our cross—maybe because we once thought them too much of a crown; but having chosen the right course let us abide by it, and leave the rest to Providence. If they take away our son's situation, he is young, sturdy, and of fair repute to get another; and though we may be sorely straitened, He who feeds the fowls of the air will not let a poor preacher of the gospel want. Yet to my thinking, Nelly, it might be as well to tell Simon nothing of this morning's business. It may be, after all, but a clamouring woman's talk. He is young, and might wish to draw back for our sakes, or else see slights and offences where nobody meant them."

Mrs. Frazer came to her husband's conclusion, as she generally did in all weighty matters—and this was no light one. Though they kept it from Simon and Andrew, it troubled the poor couple in their sleep, made them groan in the midst of their daily duties, and mingled with their prayers.

As for Miss Sibyl, she went home with a heart full of indignation, which could find fitting vent only through the ears of her cousin, Archibald. Into them the fiery flood was poured on the first opportunity for private conference. Miss Sibyl told him a not unvarnished tale, we regret to say—but when did ever anger speak the truth?—how she "gaed to the manse just to

ax Mrs. Frazer whaur that mantle o' hers was dyed ; and Simon's name come up ;" whereon Miss Sibyl rehearsed all the remarks she had extracted from the minister's wife, considerably garbled and pieced out with additions of her own. In short, she gave Mr. Leslie to understand that the Frazers had contemned him and his family, scorned his offered alliance, and spoken lightly of his daughter. If it were intended for good to man, a great deal of mischief can be effected by that power of working him up conferred on the weaker vessel. The fathers of the Church regarded it as a special gift from the old serpent ; but, however pious and orthodox, they were not in general complimentary to the fair sex. Yet it is curious, and worthy of consideration, that not only the woman who holds his heart in thrall, but almost any female tongue, can stir up a man's vengeance, wake his ambition, rouse his pride—in short, set him on anything according to its drift. Archibald Leslie was but a son of him who was persuaded to eat the forbidden fruit. He had considerable confidence in his cousin as regarded the family honour, and was rather weak on that point himself. So it happened that though Simon heard nothing of the stormy interview at home, he could not help observing a great and sudden change in his employer's manner. It had altered from familiarity to coldness, from kindness to something very like snubbing. Simon guessed the true cause, and silently began to look for another situation. He was not too early about it, for hidden wrath soon finds an apology. Mr. Leslie entered the office unexpectedly one day, and found him studying a plan of the Manchester and Liverpool Railway. It was a subject which occupied a good deal of

Simon's attention, and the hour was a spare one; but Mr. Leslie chose to consider it a countenancing of his enemies.

"Are you taking to George Stephenson's stuff, young man?" he said, in a master's tone. "I thought people about my office knew better."

"I have been looking at a plan of the new railway, sir," said Simon calmly, though his spirit was up in arms. "It seems to me, as it does to many, a practicable undertaking, and very likely to succeed."

"It seems the ——!" cried Mr. Leslie, losing his assumed dignity, as well as his temper. This would have been too much for him at any time, and now it was not to be borne. "Since you can take up opinions contrary to your elders and your master, young man, we had better part company, and you can join the new humbug—which is to be so practicable and successful—if you please."

"I think, sir," said Simon, quietly getting up and putting the plan in his pocket, "we had better part company, for reasons not all connected with the railway business."

"What do you mean?" thundered the engineer, perceiving he had committed himself.

"This is neither the time nor place to explain, sir. I wish you a very good morning," and Simon marched out of the office, looking so immensely dignified that the outside people thought he must have obtained some signal promotion. The dignity continued till he got fairly out of Moorgate Street, and then sober, sad reflection went with him through streets, and lanes, and alleys, which he traversed to cool down and think what

was best to be done before he went home to tell his poor mother the news. The end of his deliberations was to go forthwith to Lancashire and try to obtain employment in what Mr. Leslie termed the new humbug, for all other kinds of engineering were particularly flat just then. "If I don't succeed there," thought Simon, "they want surveyors in America. I'll leave the remains of my salary with the old people, and work my passage out. They needn't know what I want or have." Home he went on that settlement, and told the news as cheerfully as he could, assuring his mother at the same time that there was every chance of his getting a far better situation in Lancashire. Of course it surprised neither her nor the minister, and Simon talked so confidently of his Lancashire prospects that the poor people's hearts felt lighter now that their fear had come to certainty, and nothing worse could happen. It was agreed that he should go to Liverpool without delay. Simon had no time to lose, his preparations never cost long; but sure as he appeared at home of the railway situation, America seemed the most probable goal to his own mind. In that case he would write, but never return home till better days came. The news of Herbert Leiton's arrest had by this time rung throughout the land. The minister's family had more than common interest in it, as the murdered lady was a kind of relation to Mrs. Frazer; but having had no connection with the Leitons in the palmy days, they were in no hurry to claim it now. Herbert Leiton had cousins, however, who lived in Park Place. Simon had been accused of acting the Judas, and a great deal more, there. They had all fallen into troubles of different

kinds, and he was going away, perhaps never to come back. Might it not be well for both parties to try and make up the quarrel? He felt sure that Annie had come home from the now disresponsible Hall, and his departure being fixed for the beginning of the following week, he walked up one Saturday evening to No. 2.

Simon's feet were on the steps and his hand on the knocker, yet the young man paused to see that the opening speech he had been preparing all the way was the proper thing, when somebody came up the steps behind him, and the opposite street lamp shone on Mr. Johnstone.

"Good evening, Mr. Frazer," said the old man, who had seen Simon before the latter was aware of his presence. He was courteously answered, though with an inward wonder, "What always brought him where he wasn't wanted?" "If you are coming to see Mr. Hope, neither he nor his daughter is at home—the one is in Liverpool, and the other with those unfortunate people in Castleford. But I have been wishing to see you for some time. Will you step up to my room?" and Mr. Johnstone knocked vigorously.

In his present circumstances any advance from a man of such capital was not to be disregarded, and with a polite acceptance of his invitation, Simon accompanied him to the first floor, so much occupied with what Mr. Johnstone wanted that he scarcely noticed the amazed look which Susan cast up the stairs after them.

"Sit down, Mr. Frazer," said his host, giving the fire a poke and seating himself. "Terrible business this in Castleford. That comes out of match-making for money, Mr. Frazer."

"A sad business indeed, sir," said Simon, without noticing the knowing look with which the old man addressed him.

"I thought at one time you were going to make a match of that kind with old Leslie's daughter?"

"I never had any intention of the kind, sir."

"I know you had not; but I know she had—and a nice bargain you would have made by leaving Annie Hope for her and the thirty thousand old Archie talked of. You needn't look so surprised, lad. Folk's secrets gets wind when they think they're all hidden. Well for you that you have no worse to hide. Annie Hope is a wife for a lord, with her beauty and her sense; but she is an impudent hussy—she wouldn't take my advice."

"Did you want to marry her, sir?" said Simon, forgetting everything but the subject which interested him most.


"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the old man, throwing himself back on the chair, while his thin face took the mocking grin of a skeleton in the fitful firelight. "What a bargain I should be for a bonnie young lassie! Besides, Simon," he continued, with increased familiarity and sudden seriousness, "I'm a near relation of hers—an uncle, maybe—though I don't own it for family reasons. You see, that man, her father"—Mr. Johnstone's words were coming slowly—"did a bad turn to me—a very bad turn. It's long ago, and not worth talking about—but I can't get over it—and I'm rich, Simon—you know that—there's nobody in all this world I care for, but that girl; and if she would come to live with me, and keep my house—keep myself from being a

solitary, desolate old man, as I am, with all my money, I would settle a decent annuity on Hope, just for her sake—he'll never be worth a groat—and make her heiress of all I have. Simon, there is another thing to be considered. I wouldn't say anything against her marrying a good, honest, likely lad, with a respectable profession, if he hadn't a penny. I have money enough to set him up in as good a business as Archibald Leslie's, and better—if he had sense to take the railway in hand—that's the speculation that will pay now. Simon, I know you like the lass—I don't hide behind hedges for nothing—and I know the lass likes you, though she's not a lady of Miss Leslie's sort to be won without the wooing. Annie's a girl that knows her own value—and so she should—where's her equal to be seen? But, Simon, though there was a tiff between you and her at one time for something you said about that man, her father—I'll warrant it was every word true—you might make it up again. She is at Castleford now, staying with that poor woman who has got frightened out of her judgment through Herbert Leiton's crime—yes—I'm speaking plain—he's guilty of the murder, and will be hanged for it. It was sore against my will that ever Jessie Monro married him; but lasses are mostly fools—and Annie's staying there because they are in trouble. That's Hope's nonsense—and she'll get mixed up in their disgrace—maybe brought into court about it. Now, Simon, you're out of old Leslie's employment—yes, yes—I know it all, and why he quarrelled with you, too—but I have some business for you to do in Castleford—the water-power of my paper-mill is getting choked with sand (that river always



brings it down with its floods)—you could just go and look after it. I'll bear your expenses and pay you, too. You could have an opportunity of seeing her, and getting reconciled—mind, I'm your friend, and will do all I promised; but Annie must come and live with me. You know how to persuade her, Simon—I could once persuade a lass myself, but that's past and gone, and little pleasure to think of. It will be to the advantage of you both. Where is the good of such a father as Hope? There he is, in Liverpool, spending his time about other people's business, and leaving her at Castleford to get involved in Leiton's trial. Mind, Simon, Leiton is very little of a relation to him, and nothing at all, I may say, to Annie. Advise her to come home here—the house is mine, but she'll be welcome. When can you start for Castleford? I think the sooner the better. Put up at the "Windham Arms", and don't want for anything genteel—you were born in Scotland, lad, and know how to do a cannie business."

"A man in love, and incorruptible!—you are a fool, my good Comines," said Louis the Eleventh to his over-honest secretary, in the flower of French plays; and Simon Frazer furnished no argument against the old fox. All the while Mr. Johnstone was speaking he sat fixed and motionless as his own chair, his ears drinking in the astounding discourse, and his mind in a tumult of thoughts that passed swift and brilliant as the sheet-lightning flashes through the summer night. The rich, eccentric old man was not his rival, but Annie's uncle, with the best intentions towards her and himself. There was no going to Liverpool to look for a situation—no working his passage



to America—no years of separation now. A business, better than that of his late employer—a prospect of providing for his father and mother (he would have married Miss Leslie for that)—and here was a chance of getting the woman of his choice! “I know you like the lass, and the lass likes you”—that put the crown and garland on Simon’s hopes. The man was in love, and not incorruptible; therefore, he overlooked for the time the strange and unnatural conditions annexed to those brilliant promises, and was pleased to forget that Mr. Johnstone was employing him to wile Annie Hope away from her father.

“I’ll go on Monday, if you like, sir,” he said, as soon as the words would come. “I’m much obliged to you for your good opinion, and——”

“Never mind being obliged, lad—if I hadn’t a good opinion of you, I wouldn’t send you after Annie,” and, pulling out the very same well-worn and well-filled pocket-book with which he had once endeavoured to dazzle the eyes of Hope’s daughter, Mr. Johnstone threw a twenty-pound note across the fire to Simon, saying, “Here’s something to bear your expenses—by all means go on Monday.”

“It’s too much, sir,” stammered the young man.

“No, no, Simon. I am a skinflint of an old fellow—but I have it, and can part with it now and then. There will be some of that wanted in the manse, or I’m mistaken. Your father’s kirk don’t pay well now—the more’s the pity, for he’s an honest man, and not a bad preacher, though I can’t agree with him in that doctrine of the elect being chosen before the Fall. If you manage well, Mrs. Simon Frazer may be riding to

London Wall Kirk in her carriage—a bonnier sight than that brazen face, Miss Leslie, I judge. Susan,” he continued, ringing the bell till she appeared, “bring up tea, and two Finnin haddies for me and Mr. Frazer.”

Susan’s eyes looked not much less than the china saucers she brought up, with downright astonishment—it was the first exhibition of hospitality Mr. Johnstone had ever made within her knowledge. Simon could never recollect accurately the conversation at that unique tea; it was about Archie Leslie’s obstinacy—what a limmer his daughter was—what a paying business the railway would become—and how George Stephenson had got the right sow by the ear. When all that was discussed, and Mr. Johnstone had warned him not to tell the old folks all he was going to do in Castleford, remarking “It’s wiset to kee something to yourself, lad, even from the folk at home”—when he had further enjoined him to start on Monday, without fail, and not forget to look after the water-power—Simon saw that he was expected to take leave, for Mr. Johnstone was an early man. He did so with all the thanks and protestations of devotion to the service that would be permitted; but as he descended there was Susan, candle in hand, at the foot of the stair.

“Well, Susan,” said Simon, uttering the first thing he thought of, “has Sam Jones brought you any more letters?”

“Let him just try to show his nose in the place where I am; but, oh! Mr. Fraser, ain’t it dreadful about Mr. Leiton?”

“It is, Susan.”

“And ain’t it oncommon of Miss Hope to be stay-

in' with them in Castleford?—maybe to get frightened out of her wits like t'other poor lady. Oh! Mr. Frazer, if somebody would go and fetch her home!"

"Don't be afraid, Susan, no harm will happen to Miss Hope," said Simon, getting the door open, and darting out, for fear of further parley.

"If you han't cotched some of his hodness upstairs, I'm a Jew," said Susan, as she first looked after, then barred the door behind him, and retired to her citadel below.

When Simon was fairly out of reach he paused on the solitary road to collect his thoughts, and make sure he was not dreaming. It was the very spot at which the sight of Mr. Johnstone had made him turn when going back to make up his Sunday quarrel with Annie. Now the old man was offering him prospects too brilliant to be believed in. Instinctively he took out his pocket-book, and looked at the note—it was not fairy-paper, but true and tangible as the Bank of England could make it. Yet, as he looked at it by the moonlight, the trail of the serpent became visible: they say it is never far from money. There was the earnest of a bribe for enticing an only daughter to leave her father. What sort of an uncle was he who could offer such conditions?—what reason did he show for it?—that Hope had done him a bad turn long ago. Neither nations nor men of opposite characters can do each other justice. Hope had given Simon credit for disregarding love and friendship on account of thirty thousand and an engineer's establishment. Now, Simon gave him credit for spending his time about other people's business, and never being worth a groat; but

that he had ever done a turn bad enough to provoke such retaliation, was not within the compass of Simon's faith. Moreover, the minister's son had been brought up in the power and promise of the fifth commandment, and had not forgot his teaching; but the business better than Mr. Leslie's, Mrs. Simon Frazer riding to London Wall kirk in her carriage, and better still, welcoming him home with the smiles of Annie Hope, were thrown into the opposite scale, and Simon's scruples kicked the beam. Mr. Johnstone might get over his whim—there might be an understanding between Annie and her father—it would be to Hope's advantage in the long run, and the old man couldn't live for ever. Having given these sops to the Cerberus within, Simon went home and informed the Frazers that he had met Mr. Johnstone, had been invited to tea with him, and engaged to look after the water-power of his paper-mill in Castleford. The old man had paid him in advance, he didn't exactly know why, but his mother might have half the money—and she needn't save it too carefully, for Mr. Johnstone was going to establish a business of his own, and had as good as promised him a better situation than the one he had lost. Joyful were their hearts to hear the tale, and great was their praise of Mr. Johnstone—he was a man of sense, though people called him odd—any business he set up would prosper, and Providence had sent him to help them in their need. Simon answered all their questions satisfactorily; but when he knelt with them at their evening prayer, and his father gave emphatic thanks for the peculiar mercies of that day, he could not join in the devout acknowledgment, by reason of that something

kept to himself. It was kept, nevertheless, and Simon set out for Castleford on Monday, warned his driver off a close carriage, at the entrance of the village—inspected the water-power — heard Mr. Hamilton's report—wrote his own statement of the engineering difficulties—and learnt, by circuitous inquiries at the "Windham Arms," that Miss Hope "had gone with Mrs. Berkley to her Villar, because the old lady was narvous, and would stay no longer at the 'all."

The evening after he received that intelligence brought Simon up to London by the Colchester coach, revolving in his mind schemes of attack on Berkley Villa, but able to fix on none that might effect a practicable breach, and resolved to hear what Mr. Johnstone could suggest before he made any attempt. The minister's son had by this time succeeded in persuading himself that he was bound on doing the Hopes a signal service, but Susan's face showed him that something particular had happened the moment she opened the door of Number Two.

"Oh! Mr. Frazer, I'm upset entirely with that uncommon old man. If ever a parson went mad, he's gone!"

"Where is he, Susan?"

"On the high road to Bedlam," said the Welsh maid, continuing her own discourse. "You see, at the beginnin' of the afternoon, Mrs. Berkley's maid—a very respectable young parson, though she's a Jarman, and don't just speak proper—comes over and tells me that Miss Hope had left Castleford and gone to her father in Liverpool. Wasn't I glad to hear that news, Mr. Frazer?—though I must say they took it in a hurry at

last. I should like to have seen my young missis, and axed her if it was real truth what's said about that place. Well, I was rejoicin' with the Jarman girl, and I hears him bangin' about upstairs—you see, he always sits with the door open, to keep watch like—and when she was gone he rings his bell fit to break it, and I goes up. 'What's that news you're talkin' about?' says he. 'The best in the world, sir,' says I. 'Miss Hope's off to her father in Liverpool.' And then, Mr. Frazer—I wouldn't repeat what he said. 'It was nothin' less than cursin' anyhow. His eyes blazed up like a fiery furnace. He stamped through the room, and thumped with his stick, till I was glad to run out of it; and when he was done rampin', he comes down-stairs and throws me this dirty bit of paper. I've kept it in my pocket for carefulness. 'Give that to Mr. Frazer,' says he, 'when he calls.' And out he goes, I'm sure and sartin on the high road to Bedlam."

The dirty piece of paper, as Susan had suitably described it, contained only,

"Look after the water-power. I'll see about the rest of the business. I think your estimate is fair. Tell Hamilton to pay you if I don't come back in time.

"ALEXANDER JOHNSTONE."

"Never mind, Susan. Mr. Johnstone will come back all right. He is a highly respectable gentleman, though a little odd at times," said Simon, endeavouring not to look disappointed. "When he comes, tell him I called and got the paper. Good evening." And the skilful young engineer walked away smiling.

But Susan's eyes were not to be so cheated. She looked after him with a sigh of romantic sympathy, and

informed Betsy Wills—who, having seen the interview from the dairy-door, had found an immediate errand to Number Two—"that tongue could not tell the true love Mr. Frazer had to her young missis. You see he comed on purpose, thinkin' she was here, and makin'-believe to have business with that oncommon hold man; and when he heard Miss Hope had gone to Liverpool, the young gentleman looked as if he had lost a thousand-ing pounds. Oh! Betsy, he's the true lover, and no mistake!"



## CHAPTER VII.

## MEETINGS NOT ANTICIPATED.

WHILE Susan thus sympathized, and Simon marched away, feeling rather uncertain whether his new employer was not progressing in the direction she had indicated, and fearing that he had taken a piece of unprofitable work in hand, Annie was posting across the country between Birmingham and Yorkshire, under the escort of old Watson. He had presented himself at Berkley Villa as the clock struck eight on the morning after her arrival there, as thin, as wiry, and as active-looking as on the night when he marshalled Annie up the creaking stair in Gray's Inn to her first consultation of any lawyer.

"Good morning, Miss," said he, as if no time, no events, had passed since then. "I'm glad to see you well, and I hope you are packed; for the Liverpool coach will start at a quarter to nine."

Annie was packed—that work never occupied her long.

"Independent of the summons, it will be well for you to be out of the way, my dear," said Mrs. Berkley. "I

would go to the Continent myself, only it would look like deserting the Leitons in their trouble. Besides, such news follows one. It is just as well to face it at home."

These were the old lady's private remarks, but she sent a great many public messages of friendship and regard to Mr. Hope, gave Annie her blessing aside, and looked immensely relieved as they drove away in the hackney-coach—the only vehicle Watson thought respectable.

The Liverpool mail took them to Birmingham the same day, among the crowd of travellers which mail and stage from all parts of England then brought into that central town. By-the-way, it was one of the places the railway was to ruin. Thence they proceeded by high road and by-roads, to which Annie's geography did not extend. But Watson knew them all; and, notwithstanding his master's haste on the subject, pursued his journey with a method and precision worthy of some ancient gentleman travelling from London to York. They moved slowly over the rough places—which were not few—in their track; they walked up hills; they took shelter from heavy rain; and stopped for rest and refreshment at all the inns he considered respectable. It was a cheerless journey, being partly through the mining districts, and partly through the moorlands of the northern counties, in mid-winter time. But Watson enlivened the lengthened dulness of the way by relating, for Annie's entertainment, the romances of his legal experience. He had sat at the desk for almost sixty years, and served three generations of lawyers, whom he reckoned—as nations do their kings—by the style of the first, second, and third Mr. Vasey. By-the-way,

Watson spoke of the latter as a boy who might come to something when he got steady and didn't go quite so fast. "You see, Miss Hope, young people are always in a hurry, and haste makes waste," he said of the grey-haired solicitor. The Vaseys were his monarchs, and the law was Watson's world. History, with him, consisted of *nisi prius* actions; his light literature was breach of promise cases, which Watson considered most suitable for a lady's ear. The chief of these novels concerned a certain Captain Tilbury, who obtained two thousand damages from a certain widow, and then married her maid. Watson was in the midst of its third rehearsal as they drove through a wide, grey moor, where the dry heath and stunted ferns seemed acquainted with nothing but the east wind and the lead-coloured sky which hung over them that dreary afternoon, when something like houses began to appear. On nearer approach, Annie could see that one of them was a large cottage, long, low, and thatched. Its windows were narrow, its walls were thick; it had a porch in front, and a farm-yard in the rear; round it lay a large rough farm, with a few cabins scattered among the fields; and Watson, pausing in his description of the train and high-heeled shoes in which the widow appeared on her trial, said, "There is Moorside."

Moorcentre would have been a more suitable name for the place. It lay in the heart of those barren heaths and fells which extend from a little beyond Sheffield to the summit of Blackstone Edge, covering a large portion of the West Riding of Yorkshire, and skirting the counties of Lancaster and Derby. The railway from Manchester to Sheffield now pours a tide

of traffic and travel through the district. Inns have been built and villages have grown up in consequence; but when Annie Hope sought refuge from a subpoena there, the nearest church and market were to be found at Glossop, and it was fifteen miles off; the nearest farmhouse was just within five miles, and that long low cottage was the only house of entertainment for travellers in all the moorlands. The old north road, not much wider than a sheep-walk, and never macadamized, ran past its front. The moorland wind whistled among the heath and fern that grew up to its walls. It had no sign of the ordinary description, but in a stone above the porch there was, rudely sculptured, a figure resting on a scythe, or sickle. It might have been Death, it might have been Time—for the weather of many winters had dealt hardly with it; but on its account the house was called "The Reaper."

"Rather a lonely place, Miss Hope, I must allow," said Watson, in answer to the blank look with which Annie surveyed her destination. "Rather lonely and out-of-the-way, but nobody will find you out here; and I forgot to mention"—here Mr. Watson consulted a pocket-book that looked as old as himself—"your name is to be Miss Annie Barrett. Mr. Vasey thought it safe to keep the Christian name, as you knew it best; and if you have anything particular to write about, just direct to his chambers, put 'Important' on the left-hand corner, and keep up your spirits. You will only have to stay till the assizes are over, and your cousin's case is decided one way or other."

While he spoke, a great dog began barking in the porch, as if to give notice, and immediately two maids came out,

with hair tightly twisted up, and dressed in blue short-gowns and brown petticoats; then a tall, powerful-looking woman, grey-haired, but still fresh-coloured and handsome, dressed in a grey linsey gown, check apron, and muslin cap, whom Watson saluted with, "Good evening, Mrs. Grimshaw. You remember me, I'll warrant. I'm Watson, Mr. Vasey's clerk; and here's his niece, Miss Annie Barrett, I have brought to stay with you for some little time."

"Good evening, Mr. Watson—I'm glad to see you again; and"—here the woman stopped, as if surprised out of her propriety at the sight of Annie; she gave one amazed look at her, then, suddenly recollecting herself, continued—"I am glad to see Mr. Vasey's niece, too. You are very welcome, child," and Mrs. Grimshaw kindly shook hands with her, and conducted her into the house; while Annie scarcely knew what to say for wonder what she could see so strange about her. "Come in, child; you must be tired, and in want of your supper." It was not yet the London dinner hour; and, without giving Annie time to help, she stripped off her cloak and bonnet. "Sit down and warm yourself—there's a good fire—and I'll get you a good supper in no time," said Mrs. Grimshaw, handing her to a seat.

The girl's teeth chattered, and her fingers were stiff with cold. Her London dress was but a poor defence against the wind of the Yorkshire moors. Yet the strangeness of the place overcame every other feeling. From the porch she had stepped into a large kitchen, decorated with shelves of pewter, furnished with massive tables, benches, and huge cupboards in every

corner ; and, half-covered by a projecting chimney, below there was a hearth, with handirons, and a mighty fire of peat and bogwood ; above, hams and flitches hung pickling in the smoke. On either side there was fixed a wooden settle, on one of which Annie was installed ; and before the other stood a spinning-wheel. It was like going back a hundred years to come from London to that ancient inn ; but Annie remarked that the walls and ceiling were as white as lime could make them ; that the furniture, which was all of dark oak, was polished like so much mahogany ; that the pewter plates and dishes shone like so many mirrors ; and that the windows—they had leaden sashes, with diamond-shaped panes—looked as if they had never seen dust.

The two maids took charge of the chaise and horses—they were the only ostlers to be seen ; the postilion was directed into the second kitchen. Annie could see that court of the Gentiles, the door of communication being ajar. It opened into the farmyard, but looked as clean, and had as good a fire, as the superior apartment.

There Mrs. Grimshaw busied herself about culinary affairs, and conversed with the travellers ; while Watson laid aside his great-coat and wrapper, and seated himself beside the spinning-wheel, remarking that it was the very seat he had occupied when last at the house with Mr. Vasey, seven years past at Martinmas.

The good supper which Mrs. Grimshaw set before them, on a round table under the sheltering chimney, might have served a company of reapers at harvest home. It included every Yorkshire delicacy, from hot

cakes to white puddings, and the only concern of the hostess was to make Annie do it justice.

"You are strange, child, to the moors," she said, "and the place will be lonesome to you, coming out of London. I'll warrant you'll think our ways queer and odd."

"I'll soon learn them, ma'am," said Annie.

"No doubt you will, if your uncle lets you stay long enough." First the woman smiled; then she took another long look at her, and sighed deeply, but said, as if to turn the conversation, pointing to a door on either side, "There's two parlours, but they were scoured out to-day. I was afraid they might be damp, and thought you would be warmer here."

When she could get them to eat no more, Mrs. Grimshaw removed the supper with her own hands. The two maids, having finished their out-door duties, came in to like business in the second kitchen. The mistress sat down between her guests to knit a large woollen stocking. When the night fell she threw additional bogwood on the fire, lighted a thick tallow candle, and set it in a bright brass sconce hanging against the wall, as palace halls were lighted in the sixteenth century. Watson and she discussed the news of Moorside for the last seven years. It concerned farmers and farm-houses, bakings and brewings which had come off at the inn. He informed her how Mr. Vasey was, and what a great murder case he had on hand now. Mrs. Grimshaw talked to Annie too, chiefly about the difference between Moorside and London, with which she seemed to be deeply impressed, though Glossop was the southern boundary of the good woman's

travels; but ever in the pauses of their discourse, or when she thought herself unobserved, the same long looks were bent upon the girl—and now there was sad memory rather than surprise in them. Annie had never seen Mrs. Grimshaw before; but her accent sounded like Simon Frazer's, and the landlady of "The Reaper" had other recommendations to her good opinion. Though evidently uneducated, somewhat masculine in her manner, and rather stern of look, Mrs. Grimshaw was neither coarse nor vulgar, but a shrewd, sensible woman when her out-of-the-world life and habits were allowed for, and kindly withal. Yet those looks of hers puzzled Annie. It surely could not be her London dress—so different from anything there—that made the woman sigh? When the large clock in the corner struck eight Mrs. Grimshaw informed them it was bed-time, got a fire lighted in Annie's room, gathered her household into the best kitchen—it consisted only of the two maids and the newly-arrived postilion—read them a chapter of the Proverbs of Solomon, made a short extempore prayer, sent the postilion to sleep in the attic, escorted Mr. Watson to his room behind the one parlour, and Annie to her resting-place, which opened from the other. "This is my private parlour," said she. "I take nobody in here but ladies, and they don't come many to Moorside. The other is for squires and gentlemen, that come here sometimes from their hunts or their travels on market-days, when the kitchen is full of farmers. You'll sit here, then, child. I wouldn't have Mr. Vasey's niece seen and talked to by every comer to the inn. It's a nice place," and the candle (which she elevated in a kind of domestic triumph) showed



Annie wainscoted walls, furniture of mahogany of ancient make, and a piece of carpet of that old-fashioned kind called Turkey, spread in front of the fire-place. The rest of the floor had been scoured beyond a doubt, and there were also an antiquated writing-desk and work-table, to which Mrs. Grimshaw pointed, saying, "They'll be of use to you, child. I have neither hands nor learning for the like. But I'll warrant you can write and sew?"

"Oh! yes, ma'am," said Annie. "And I'll be glad to do anything of the kind for you."

"I'm obliged to you, dear. Your uncle said you had got a good education, and you're going to be a governess. I hope he'll get you a good place, and that they'll be kind to you, for I think you're a good girl. He tells me your father and mother are gone. Did you lose them early?"

"I did, ma'am," said Annie. There was no getting over the fib.

"Well, child, our best Father is above. Put your trust in Him. But you'll be glad to get to bed, and here's your room," said Mrs. Grimshaw, ushering her into a small chamber wainscoted like the parlour, half-occupied by a large four-posted bed, hung with crimson, otherwise meagrely furnished, though the hostess showed her with pride that there was a chest of drawers in it. The fire-place was small, so was the window, which Mrs. Grimshaw proceeded to secure with massive shutters; and while she was doing so Annie perceived that her room was divided from a still smaller one by a partition, which rose only half way to the ceiling. "It's to give the place light," said her hostess. "That room

has no window. There was a tax on them, you see, when this house was built, and it's too old to alter. The door goes into the second kitchen, but I never put anybody there to sleep except some decent, respectable woman that I know, or myself maybe, when the house is full, though I mostly like the press-bed in the best kitchen. Good night, child. If you want anything more just speak to me. I shan't be in bed for half-an-hour yet."

Annie had not been used to such early retirement. She lay awake long after the house was silent, thinking of Herbert Leiton's case, of her father, and of Simon Frazer, what he had come to do at Castleford, listening to the gusty wind as it sighed over the wide moorlands, till the last embers of the peat fire died, and her thoughts merged into dreams. From that world of fancy Annie was recalled by a light flashing in her eyes, and there stood Mrs. Grimshaw with the candle in one hand—for it was still deep night—and a loose bundle of clothes in the other.

"I'm glad you sleep so well in your first night here," she said. "But it's half-past six, child!—and your breakfast is ready."

"Do you always rise so early?" said Annie, rubbing her eyes.

"Oh! we always rise at five in winter, and four in summer, excepting Fridays, when we rise at three, because that's the market-day at Glossop. Rachel has to go off with the butter and cheese, and I and Jane have a job getting ready for the folks. Get up, child, and dress yourself—and listen to me. Your things are far too light and fine for Moorside. Your uncle bid me not

to let you wear them. They were quite genteel in London, I'm sure ; but farmers' sons and young gentlemen come here, and it don't do for a girl to get remarked for wearing fal-dals. This is Friday, you see—and being up so early, I had time to turn out my chest. Here is a nice camlet gown, fit for any lady. I got it made by the first mantua-maker in Glossop, for a present to one of Mr. Grimshaw's nieces, just before he died, poor man, fifteen years ago. She behaved ill to me, and never got it ; but I think it will fit you, child, all to being a trifle too big ; and here is a lawn-handkerchief and apron—part of my own wedding-clothes. But I'll give them to you, and this turtleshell comb," she continued, displaying one of antique mould ; "for you must put up your hair, child. Those long curls of yours don't do about a house like this. They would catch wandering eyes—and I don't want to make you vain ; but you're past the common for beauty, and have the more need to walk discreetly."

Annie promised compliance, much admiring, in her own mind, the dexterity with which Barrett Vasey had turned the honest woman's prejudices to the purpose of her concealment.

"That's a good girl," said Mrs. Grimshaw. "Your uncle said you had sense. Put your fine London things all away ; and if you stay till summer, I'll get a mantua-maker from Glossop to make you up some gowns of nice stamped linen I have, and a nice gingham for Sundays. You're an Episcopalian, I understand ?"

"Yes, ma'am, I belong to the Church of England."

"Well, you can go to church, child, when the days get long and fine. Jonah—he's the most discreet of

the men here—will drive you over in the cart. But dress yourself, for the breakfast is ready.”

Annie did dress herself. It was a hard task to smooth out the long curls ; but at length she accomplished it, with the help of cold water and the “turtlesell” comb; and when arrayed in tight bands and a top-knot—the dark-green camlet gown, made fifteen years before, and so large that it had to be taken in with pins—the lawn apron and handkerchief, arranged in Quaker-like folds, and as white as snow—her own appearance in the small looking-glass fairly astonished the girl.

“Should you know me, Mr. Watson?” she said, emerging into the parlour, where her faithful conductor stood with his back to the fire, surveying the formidable preparations for a state breakfast at Moorside.

“I can’t say I should, Miss. Perhaps your father might ; but you’re safe from being summonzed anyhow.”

“Ay, that’s neat,” said Mrs. Grimshaw, entering at the moment. “Don’t she look well and wiselike beside in those London gewgaws? But, oh child!” and the woman sighed once more, “whatever trim you wear you remind me of a girl I liked well once. She had her own share of troubles in this world, and she’s gone, I hope, to a better place this many a year. But, Mr. Watson, when you brought that girl out of the chaise to me, I thought it was the dead come to life again—such a likeness I never saw. But fall to your breakfasts. We don’t drink tea here—the very gentlefolks do with beer when they come to Moorside ; but I knew you Londoners couldn’t do without it, and sent for some to Glossop last market-day. However, there’s no cups in

the house, but some my goodman's mother left that you couldn't turn a thimble in—here's two nice basins for you." Mrs. Grimshaw filled up the basins out of a punch-kettle, which did duty for a tea-pot, and, as she said, set them to their breakfasts by the light of a blazing fire, and the dawn of the winter morning. It came with the dull grey sky and piercing wind of the previous day; but she and Watson agreed it was uncommonly fine weather, and "Miss Barrett," said he, "now that I see you safe, and settled with Mrs. Grimshaw, I know Mr. Vasey will want me—he is so busy with that murder case. You heard of it in London, of course."

"Oh, yes!" said Annie.

"Well, I had better get back as quickly as possible." Mrs. Grimshaw gave him every assurance of her kind attentions to Mr. Vasey's niece—that she would keep tea in the house for her, and see that she didn't get cold by coming to the moors; and the old man, after taking a private opportunity to fortify Annie's courage—telling her how short a time she would have to stay, and what a respectable woman her hostess was—girded on his wrappers, mounted his chaise, and departed as leisurely as he came. When Watson was gone, Mrs. Grimshaw showed her over the premises, of which the honest woman was not a little proud—the parlour and bedroom for gentlemen—the large unpartitioned attic, with four great beds in it, where they quartered the storm-stayed farmers—the first and second pantries, with all the good things she made in them—the dairy, the farm-yard, and all their belongings.

"Have you a garden, ma'am?" said Annie.

"No, child, there's neither time nor weather for gar-

dening on the moors. If we get the hay and oats in dry, it's the mercy of Providence. But we grow some cabbages and peas on the sunny side of the ditches. Now, there's your own parlour," said Mrs. Grimshaw, conducting her to the door—"you'll sit there, Annie. Isn't that your name?"

"It is, ma'am."

"Well, I can't be saying Miss to young folks, being mistress here fifteen years, and nothing but followers about me."

Annie protested against the Miss with all her might.

"I know you don't want it, dear, but you'll go in and sit there; the market folks will be coming, and I wouldn't have Mr. Vasey's niece seen and talked to by everybody. You may sit at the window and look out, but you mustn't sit idle, it's not prudent like; I'll give you a fine sheet to hem—that's nice, genteel work."

Annie got the fine sheet, and sat in state, hemming it, and seeing the market folks, who now began to appear, and it was surprising what numbers passed and called at the solitary house. The old North road, stretching as it did far over the brown moorlands, was positively thronged with country carts, in which rosy-faced maids, with cloaks and hoods on, sat between great baskets of dairy produce, mounted farmers with their wives behind them on antiquated pillions, and occasionally a country squire riding his hunter. Everyone had business at "The Reaper." Through the parlour-door, which stood half open, while Mrs. Grimshaw moved in and out to keep her one guest company, and look after the rest, Annie could see that the best kitchen had been turned into a species of tap-room, for

their accommodation, its long tables being covered with pewter pots and measures; beyond stood butts of beer and kegs of spirits, replenished when it was necessary out of a cellar opening close by the chimney, of which Mrs. Grimshaw kept the key. Everybody that came in got something to drink, and the inn resounded with the Yorkshire twang, as they enjoyed their gossip and cracked their jokes.

For all her straight-lacedness with the young lady from London, Mrs. Grimshaw was evidently a popular landlady, though not a subservient one; she kept in a manner the command of her customers, told them, young and old, her mind roundly, when it was needful, and had her servants and farm labourers in profound subjection. The huts of which Moorside hamlet consisted were her property, and occupied by her vassals; the men and women who dwelt in them did her farm work, and helped in the house on market days; for all the week besides, the inn had no custom, except a wandering hawker, or labourer in search of work, permitted to sup in the second kitchen and sleep in the barn; travellers rarely crossed the moor, and "The Reaper" was as private a house as heart could desire from Friday to Friday, though Mrs. Grimshaw said she had known strangers to call once a year or so.

"Excisemen, dear, or silly young folk flying to Scotland, to marry in haste and repent at leisure; they're no help to any house, and how could they be so, there's no luck with any of the sort."

All day the customers continued to come and go; they seemed to bring a great deal of news about people's cows that died, and daughters that were going to get

married ; they also got the intelligence that a young lady from London, far too genteel to help on market-days, or do anything but sew in the private parlour, had come to stay with Mrs. Grimshaw ; some of them took peeps at her through the door or window, when the landlady was otherwise occupied, and Annie was never aware of the wonder, speculation, and surmises which filled Moorland farm-house and cottage on account of her advent. It was late in the winter evening before the bustle fairly subsided, and the last cart had driven away from Mrs. Grimshaw's door. The weather being considered fine, no customers stayed for the night. Annie had sat so religiously in the parlour, and hemmed the sheet so well, as to gain the entire approbation of her hostess ; and the good woman, according to a custom from which her household had never known her to vary, devoutly gave thanks that they had got over Friday safe and well. Many a Friday came and went, and Annie remained under her sheltering roof, learning the ways of the strange place—she had a natural facility in that line.

At the end of the first week, Mrs. Grimshaw began to put a sort of confidence in her discretion ; the parlour-door was not so strictly guarded—she was allowed to pass out and in at her pleasure—the most reliable of the farmers' wives, and an itinerant Methodist preacher going on his rounds to Glossop, were introduced to the young lady, and from them she heard a deal of news regarding the position and antecedents of the principal customers.

On the third Friday her assistance was requested, “just to mark down what's had in the book, dear ; I



could write well once, but my hands are getting rough now, a pen don't seem natural to them," said Mrs. Grimshaw.

Annie marked down what was had, supplemented that important trust by giving active help in the extreme bustle of market-days, got a good deal stared at as the young lady from London, and might have obtained admirers had she been so inclined. Mrs. Grimshaw at first entertained doubts on that subject, and kept a sharp look-out on the conduct of her young visitor. A still sharper rebuke with glance or tongue was ready for all presumptuous customers; being the only landlady on the Moors, she could afford to speak her mind, and did so to some of the young men without ceremony. But as no advances were encouraged, nor even taken notice of, Mrs. Grimshaw's vigilance subsided into trust, and Annie rose to the position of an example to the Moorland maids.

"She's a girl above the common for sense and breeding," the good woman remarked, in confidential discourse with her maid Rachel, who, having served at "The Reaper" ever since she had become mistress, was believed to know a good deal of Mrs. Grimshaw's mind, "no foolish airs or minding of young men with her, she goes about her business, and the house as full as it can hold, as if there wasn't one of them in creation—talk about town and country folk, if girls on the Moors were all as prudent as that young lady from London, there would be fewer light stories, I can tell you." It might have lessened Annie's praise for the article of prudence, if Mrs. Grimshaw had only known that in her London eyes the cream and flower of the men who

drank old ale at "The Reaper," looked but so many hob-nails; and, to the end of her sojourn, Mr. Vasey's niece never could distinguish the Moorland squire or wealthy farmer from his attendant ploughman. The Fridays passed, however, and Annie got used to them. In the quiet days between she took part in the household work—did fine sewing, for which no other hand in the house was competent—marked Mrs. Grimshaw's linen to her immense satisfaction—read the Bible for her when the evening candle was burning dim and low—made herself useful, popular, and somewhat at home, for the clock-work regularity with which things went on from Friday to Friday reminded her of old times in Selkirk Cottage.

Her eye had grown familiar with the wide and dreary moorlands, with the grey, cold, windy weather so abundant in the northern counties in that most cheerless season which comes between winter and spring. The latter was drawing on. The sun began to look out on the moors, the gorse began to bud, the heath and moss to look green, and the wild dwellers of wold and fell came out of their winter quarters. Annie saw strange birds, weasels, and foxes, from a window in the best kitchen, at which she chose to sit with her sewing in the quiet forenoons, because it commanded the best view of the far off uplands—they said Blackstone Edge could be seen from it in clear summer days—and also because the side of the projecting chimney made it a warm and sheltered recess.

She was sitting there, sewing, and listening to Mrs. Grimshaw's discourse on household matters. The good woman had by this time taken her into confidence, and

was giving large details of her own achievements in the broth-making line, by which, it appeared, she had conquered the heart of Mr. Grimshaw; and, in honour of his memory, a pot of enormous dimensions was put on the fire every Wednesday, and his widow with her own hands prepared the savoury mess, in which travellers from Scotland particularly rejoiced when they chanced to come that way.

"There were more in old times than now, dear. Folks find new roads as well as new fashions," she said. "When I first came here it wasn't strange to see a coach-and-six stopping at 'The Reaper.'"

Annie instinctively glanced out at the north road, to see how such an equipage could find room on it; but, instead of the foxes and weasels she had seen on the opposite moor, there stood a man, his great-coat tightly buttoned round him, leaning on a staff, looking right into her window, and nothing but her admired discretion kept Annie from jumping off her chair—for it was Alexander Johnstone!

The old man's eye was keen, and he evidently enjoyed her amazement; he first made a sign for her to come out, then shook his stick at her, and what was her horror to see him march straight into the house? Would he let out who she was, and show the stern landlady that Vasey and she had been fibbing? There was no help for it now. Mr. Johnstone lifted the latch and walked in, saluting the landlady, who had not seen him on the moor, with—

"Good morning, ma'am. Does Mr. Grimshaw keep this house still?"

"Mr. Grimshaw's done with all houses in this troublesome world these fifteen years, and I'm his widow. What's your will, sir?" and Mrs. Grimshaw gave the broth a stir.

"A basin of that broth, if you please," said Mr. Johnstone, seating himself on one of the settles. "I'm on my way to Glossop, and have got rather hungry on the moors."

"They're not ready yet, sir. I've only just put in the grits; but, if you will wait a few minutes——"

"Oh, I'll wait. I came from Scotland in my day, and ken guid broth by the smell."

"Are you from Scotland, sir?" said Mrs. Grimshaw, her sober face relaxing into a smile.

"Yes, ma'am. When I left it two-and-twenty years ago to try my fortune in London I stopped at 'The Reaper.' That was in the first Mrs. Grimshaw's time, and her broth was not like yours, I'm sure."

"You're very kind to say so, sir. I hope they'll be to your liking."

That guest had found the way to Mrs. Grimshaw's heart.

"No doubt they will," said Johnstone, casting a casual look at Annie. "I think I have seen that young woman's face before. Isn't her name Watson?"

"No, sir—it is Barrett," said Annie, with desperate courage.

"Ah, well, old eyes are apt to be mistaken. I ask your pardon, young woman—you're from Ireland, I suppose, by your name?"

Annie did not know exactly what to say, but Mrs.

Grimshaw interposed. She was rather proud of her visitor's relationship to the great lawyer, as it was her custom to style Mr. Vasey.

"She's from London, sir, and niece to Mr. Barrett Vasey, the great lawyer. As you've been in London, sir, I'll warrant you know him?"

"Oh, yes, I know him well—a great lawyer, as you say, and what's more, an honest one. Not a bad man, neither, when he's in good temper; but I wouldn't advise you to offend him. Barrett Vasey is of Irish blood, and, like all of that strain, he is wickedly revengeful."

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Grimshaw, ladling out the broth and cooling them for the stranger, "there is few of us given to forgive and forget when the wrong happens to be a sore one. I have heard a great deal of preaching against revenge in my day, and I'll allow it's part of the corruption of human nature; but I never met with anybody able to forgive a great wrong from their hearts out, and I know it's not in myself."

"Woman!" cried Mr. Johnstone, thumping his stick as usual, and looking fiercely excited, "you don't know the evil that has been wrought by revenge!"

"Maybe I don't, sir; but I have known causes that would make me take to it," and she set the broth before him. "There was once a man, that is gone beyond human judgment now. He did wrong to a friend of mine; and I tell you if he came in my way yet, I wouldn't do that man a good turn."

Annie had seen Mr. Johnstone in many moods, but never looking cowed before, as he did when Mrs. Grim-

shaw uttered those words. He wiped his face with his handkerchief as if to get over the confusion, and fell to the broth without attempting an answer. Yet it was evident from the honest woman's manner that she had merely declared her mind on the subject of discourse with a passing traveller, and neither intended nor knew that she was speaking daggers.

"Mr. Vasey has great business on his hands now with this wonderful case in Essex. Isn't it," she said, reverting to the grandeur of her legal chieftain, "the Squire that has been taken up for killing his first wife to marry another, and was haunted night and day by her ghost? I'll warrant you've heard of it, sir, on your travels."

"Oh, yes!" said Mr. Johnstone. His eyes had been following her movements about the kitchen, as if to make out something which at once puzzled and frightened him; but he spoke with uncommon ease. "Oh, yes! everybody is talking of it. It will be an extraordinary trial. They are summoning half the county. And when I was there, there was a strict search being made for a Miss Hope, who was thought to know something about it, and has gone somewhere out of the way."

It would have been hard to say whether Annie looked at her sewing, or Mr. Johnstone at his broth, the most intently while that piece of intelligence was given. But Mrs. Grimshaw remarked that Mr. Vasey would find her out, for she never knew a man who could get to the bottom of things like him; whereon Rachel shouted from the dairy that "the curds was ready,

murm," and she left them for the important concern of cheese-making.

"Ah! you baggage!" said Johnstone, the moment the landlady was out of hearing, "you wouldn't come out of the door to me, and I have come all the way from London to look after you. If they had hidden you in the heart of a mill-stone, Annie, I would find you out. I'm glad they have sent you to a decent place—by-the-bye, do you know what they called that woman before she was married?"

"I do not, sir."

"Does Vasey know?"

"I never heard him say if he did or not." Annie was thinking of what questions she could ask on the subject.

"Ah! well, it's no matter," said Johnstone; but his look did not tally with his words. "She's an odd sort of a woman, and this is a lonely old house. I could hide you far better, Annie, if you would come with me; and I have news for you, too. Simon Frazer has lost his situation. Old Leslie turned him off, because he wouldn't marry that Jezebel—his daughter. They as good as asked him, Annie—and so did she—but he wouldn't, because the lad was true to you. Ay, that he is, and always has been, whatever Hope may say against him. Listen, Annie, I know it myself—I'm an old man, and I wouldn't deceive you, child."

"I believe you would not, sir." Annie's sewing had slipped from her hand now.

"Well, I heard him talking to Susan—when they didn't know I was behind the hedge—one day. The girl will tell you all about it—and she's an honest girl

if there's one in England. Annie, he's a good lad, and has as true a love to you as ever man had to woman. I'll set him up in business, all for your sake. I'll join your hands, and dance at your wedding maybe—since I never had the pleasure of dancing at my own—if you come with me; and these people will know nothing about it till the trial is over, and matters can be settled. I'll do what I promised for Hope, and more—he's not the man to provide for you, Annie; and he's not your father." The old man had never looked so composed and serious in all the times of his wanting an heiress before. There was a sad earnestness in his face, anxious and yet hopeless, that smote Annie to the heart. He had a real and strange affection for her—he was old and unlucky in spite of his wealth; and what he had told her of Simon Frazer the girl felt to be true. It was a sore temptation, but it involved unexplained enmity to the one man whom she had most right to love, and Annie would try to sound that mystery."

"If he is not my father, sir, why has he acted as a father to me?—why have I been always with him, and called his daughter?"

"I'll explain that, and everything else to you, Annie, before you and Simon are married, if you come with me. It's not such a wonderful story; but I can't tell it now," and the old man drew his breath hard.

"Better to tell it to me now, sir, and I shall know how to act," said Annie.

"I won't," responded Johnstone, with a look of obstinacy as fixed as the immoveable granite; "but Annie, make up your mind—this is the last time of



asking, as they say in the Church he brought you up to. If you go with me I will be a better father to you than ever Hope could be—I will make you my heiress, and set Simon up in business for your sake. If you don't, I will never speak to you more; but go my way, and leave my wealth to strangers."

The old man spoke more calmly than Annie had ever heard him; but he was looking at her as earnestly as if all his bank-stock and business speculations had been staked upon her answer. Annie's mind was made up, however, be the story what it would. She would neither be bribed nor bought away from the man in whose name she had grown up—from whom she had never met with anything but love and kindness.

"If you will do anything for Simon Frazer, I will be grateful to you all my life," she said; "but—"

"I'll do nothing for him, except you go with me."

"If you made him King of England, and me Queen," said Annie, her spirit rising to the occasion, "I would not leave Mr. Hope without his consent—and I know he would not part with me. If he be not my father, as you say, he is all the father I ever knew; and I love him better than all the world."

"Better than Simon?" said Johnstone, his eyes still fixed on her.

"I loved him before I saw Simon, and if Simon care for me he will love him too"—here Annie heard Mrs. Grimshaw returning from the cheese, caught up her sewing, and looked out of the window. Johnstone rose directly, like a man whose business was done, paid the good woman's moderate charge for his entertainment, assured her he had not tasted such broth since

he left Scotland, and marched out, stick in hand, without casting a single glance at Annie.

"You know that gentleman, dear?" said Mrs. Grimshaw—"I heard you talking as I came in."

"I do," said Annie, knowing that frankness was the best course; "he is from London, and his name is Johnstone."

"It's a great border name," said the landlady; "but I think he's very odd, and don't much like your uncle. Had they any quarrel?"

"Never that I heard of; but Mr. Johnstone is a very odd and a very rich man. He is apt to find faults with everybody. He was talking to me a deal about my relations"—Annie had learned to tell only half truth from her circumstances.

"I thought he was no common traveller—but, dear me, it's dinner-time," and Mrs. Grimshaw bustled away to the back-kitchen. Annie took the opportunity to glance out of the window, in the direction Mr. Johnstone had taken. Far up the moor, his back leant against an old mossy rock, which the gorse grew thick about, and the faint sunshine gilded, the old man was standing, and looking at the house with such a hopeless, broken-hearted expression, that, but for fear of consequences, Annie would have run up and tried to cheer him. His hat had partly fallen back, and the moorland wind blew his long grey hair about. Oh! but he looked desolate and broken down. The poorest man in all the West Riding could not have stood there more solitary and luckless-like. As Annie looked at him with wonder and pity, and tried to keep her face from being seen, a cloud of dust rose on the old North Road, and a

chaise and pair came driving at full speed to the "Reaper." It stopped, and down from her seat beside the driver came a little woman with a curiously pointed nose, and a brilliant shawl. Out of the vehicle came a little man, who looked as if nature had made him for a caricature of the species. He had a squint, a club-foot, round shoulders, and turned-out hands. He stood little more than five feet, and it was a sight to see him handing out a large, full-blown lady in the best of velvet cloaks and the finest of winter bonnets. But through the green veil with which ladies then shaded their charms Annie recognised Miss Jemima Leslie.

"I say, girl," cried the pointed nose, who had got in before she was aware, "we want fresh horses and lunch directly." But Mrs. Grimshaw was awake, and ready to protect her visitor's dignity. "Go into your parlour, if you please, Miss Barrett," said she, coming forward in a flush of indignation; "it's not for a great lawyer's niece as you are to be spoken to by every runaway trash." Annie availed herself of the timely retreat, but left a chink of her parlour door to hear and see through.

"What are you wanting, wench?" continued Mrs. Grimshaw to the pointed nose; and before the latter could get her senses or wrath collected to reply, Miss Leslie, with her hand in the bend of the little man's elbow—for leaning on his arm was an impossibility—sailed in.

"We want fresh horses, and some lunch, if you please," said the gentleman in a small, creaking voice, remarkably suited to his appearance.

"There are horses in the stable, and you may get

some broth," said the landlady with more than usual independence.

"I never eat broth—it don't agree with me. I always have a basin of arrowroot, with port wine, or calves'-foot jelly, or vermicelli soup——"

"There's nothing of that kind to be got on the moors," said Mrs. Grimshaw, cutting short his bill of fare.

"What can we have, then?" said the little man humbly. But the temper of his fair companion was not qualified for such trials.

"Let us get horses immediately and leave this horrid place!"

"Just as you please, ma'am," said the landlady; whereon Miss Leslie bounced into the chaise. The little man hopped after her, saying something about his love, which greatly amused the maid and the postilion, as they managed the change of horses. While that was being done, and the pointed nose waiting to resume her seat, an empty gig came slowly up. Mr. Johnstone had remained on his station by the rock, but turned his face to get a full view of the chaise, and Annie could see the old man laughing—it seemed with spiteful satire—at the whole scene. Now he came down, took possession of the gig, and, as it drove past in the direction the chaise had come, he made a spiteful bow to Miss Leslie, at which she slunk back, drew her veil closer over her face, and the little man gave urgent commands to drive on as quick as they could.

"I have kept this house twenty years," cried Mrs. Grimshaw, with uplifted hands, as the two vehicles

rattled away from her door—"and many a foolish going to Scotland I have seen—but such a runaway as that no Christian ever saw or heard tell of. Yes, my dear, it is a runaway. They're bound for Gretna Green—the postilion told it to Rachel and Jane. What could she see—a well-looking lass like her, and well put on, too—in that wonderful object?—and what sort of people were her friends that didn't put her in the mad-house?"

"They are very respectable, I assure you," said Annie. "My uncle knows them, and so do I slightly. Her father is Mr. Leslie, an engineer in great business, and she was said to be an heiress. But who the little man is, I don't know."

"It's a punishment for some of her sins then?" cried Mrs. Grimshaw. "Providence leaves people to themselves sometimes that way. Oh! child, this is a world of wonderful dispensations. But come along and take your dinner."

Never having seen him before, Annie Hope was not aware that the gentleman thus conducting her once formidable rival to the contraband altar was none other than James Alston. He had availed himself of the intimation of his charmer's home-coming to press the siege, not less vigorously, but with more circumspection. Letters came and went, but only through the hands of Sarah Ann and her brother. Assignations were made and kept in the retired corners of Hyde Park and the least frequented squares of Belgravia. Mr. Alston evinced the sincerity of his devotion by venturing within the Leslie fortifications. The down-stairs people had tales of his being hid in the coal cellar and the

lumber attic, and stealing out of the back gate when the coast was sufficiently clear. With her time and thoughts so occupied, no wonder that Miss Leslie was regardless of Simon Frazer keeping his distance, which so troubled her cousin's mind; and things were in this state of forwardness when Miss Sibyl made her notable inquisition into the minds and motives of the Manse family. In the private and not very agreeable conference which she and the engineer held on the subject, he had strongly urged the advisableness of saying nothing about it in the house. But adherence to such counsel was morally impossible for a dame of Miss Hamilton's temper. She had never approved of Jemima, and the airs and ongoings of that young lady were beyond toleration, now that she had brought herself and family to be undervalued by the minister's son. Their quarrels commenced with more than usual violence. Miss Jemima got hints so broad, that not only herself, but the entire household, became aware of the Frazers' mind. Of course she took the hysterics, but (like all repetitions) they had lost their power. His heiress had lost her position in the engineer's eyes too. He threw his weight into the opposite scale, and talked of sending Jemima to board with his relations in Scotland. The injured fair one had no resource but James Alston. To him she declared her wrongs on the first opportunity, and that disinterested gentleman, knowing that Archibald Leslie must and would do something for his daughter, however she married, after a sufficient display of indignation at her oppressors and devotion to her charms, advised her to take revenge on them all by flying with him to Gretna Green. The advice was

exactly suited to the lady's good sense and amiable disposition. Sarah Ann recommended it with all her might. According to her brother's prophecy, she had found Alston's courtship a paying business. An elopement was planned—Miss Leslie's best clothes and jewellery were smuggled out by the efficient maid—the young lady got hold of her papa's cheque-book and drew nearly five hundred pounds, much to the surprise (but without exciting the suspicion) of his banker—went forth on a little shopping—and started for the north with James Alston in a post-chaise, leaving behind a letter to her father, in which he was assured that nothing but the oppression of him and Miss Sibyl had made her resolve to fly with the only being who loved her.

The French say that love enters men's hearts through the eye, and women's through the ear. Though spoken by a gallant nation, the proverb is more true than complimentary to the fair sex, for it indicates that they are apt to be flattered into the business, whereof Miss Leslie was a shining example. The lady who had been at Chiswick, and made the grand tour, to whom and her reputed thirty thousand Simon Frazer had been given over by the Hopes, stole her father's money, fled northward, and made a clandestine marriage with a man whose puny and disagreeable person made it impossible that she could care for him, however mentally endowed; and who had neither gifts nor graces, except an ability to cringe and flatter beyond the common.

In the first heat of his wrath Mr. Leslie thought of setting the police on their track; but a moment's con-

sideration showed the Scotchman that such a step would be only exposing his family further, so he went about his business, said Jemima might drink as she brewed, and kept as far as possible out of Miss Sibyl's way—for the tempest of her anger was not to be listened to by any man who valued his senses, and the butler (who happened to be the most serious of the servants) described her as a bear robbed of her whelps. All storms subside, and so did that one. Mr. and Mrs. Alston made a tour of the Western Islands during the honeymoon, afterwards established themselves in Edinburgh, could not get into society in that rather exclusive town, left it and several tradesmen to make anxious inquiries after them, returned to London, and settled in Old Bond Street, with a small annuity which the engineer settled on his once boasted daughter, a smaller shop in the fancy stationer line, and an ill-kept house—where Mrs. Alston let apartments in the season, did an immense trade of quarrelling with her lodgers and servants, and carried on high life below stairs, in which comfortable settlement we take leave of the fair Jemima.



## CHAPTER IX.

## LEITON'S TRIAL.

THE news which Mr. Johnstone published over his broth in the best kitchen of "The Reaper" was at this time the topic of town and country. The day after her departure Mr. Sharp Keightley had been at the "Windham Arms," keenly inquiring about everybody at the Hall, particularly Miss Hope; and the landlord thought he must have "some remarkable business with the young lady, for no gent never looked so disappointed as him when he heard of her bein' gone." The remarkable business came out like anything connected with murder. It was very soon known that Miss Hope was being searched for near and far by the agents of justice, as an important witness in Leiton's impending trial. Nobody was keener on the scent than Mr. Keightley; but sharp as the attorney was by name, nature, and practice, the utmost stretch of his ferretting powers failed to discover that young lady's retreat. It was ascertained that she was not with her

father in Liverpool, though she had left Mrs. Berkley's house for that destination under the conduct of an old man, whom none of the servants knew—that the pair had travelled by the mail to Birmingham, but there all trace of them was lost.

Barrett Vasey got the credit of their disappearance; he was now known to be retained for Herbert Leiton, and the fiery solicitor gave himself up to the case with his accustomed earnestness. In every direction where evidence might be gleaned, or witnesses turned up, throughout Essex and the neighbouring counties, there was he inquiring, sifting, setting agents to work, and not sparing for either pains or money. But from all his rounds and researches he returned to Castleford Hall. Day after day, week after week, the lawyer came back to it like his head-quarters. The servants met him in all corners and at all hours, till they thought he was doing duty for the first Mrs. Herbert, going round the house outside and in as if he expected to get information out of its very walls—peeping into every room, passage, and cupboard; and his courage became the admiration of the entire household when it was understood that he had particularly examined that fatal repository of old dresses in the back corridor, out of which the spirit was believed to have come on Christmas eve.

The Monros thought him mighty close, he would give them no account of his motives or proceedings. Everybody else about the hall and village thought Mr. Vasey a most affable and friendly gentleman. With the servants he was familiar, with the trades-

people patronising, with the farmers edifying, as regarded both the markets and the murder. He was jovial at the "Windham Arms," he was condescending with the loungers in the forge, he was serious in Molly Spence's shop—Mr. Vasey could find an errand anywhere, but the choice and flower of his attentions were paid to Miss Law. He waylaid that select lady in her walks about the park and shrubbery—he listened to the tale of her wrongs and sorrows, of which everybody else had got tired—by-the-bye, it was now largely supplemented with woe for the Leitons—he assisted in the management of her cow—he paid most friendly visits to her cottage—and he bought her frequent presents of delicacies and articles of dress, which Miss Law never would have afforded to herself. All who saw it agreed it was wonderful what attraction Mr. Vasey found in the last of the Windhams; but a still more surprising fact was that, in spite of the listening, the friendship, and the presents, Miss Law had much more fear than welcome for her legal admirer. It was true that her praise of Mr. Vasey rose to the highest key—he was a first-rate lawyer and a model man—so clever—so good—so sincere—it was just Providence that sent him to defend her dear, innocent cousin from the calumnies of those wicked people, and none of the Leiton family could be thankful enough for his services. Yet it was observed that Miss Law went occasionally out of her way to avoid the solicitor—stole into the nearest covert when he came in sight, and got at times so occupied with her own affairs as neither to see nor hear him

knocking at the cottage door. All who knew Barrett Vasey were aware that little escaped his eye, yet he appeared to take no notice of his fair friend shirking him. His visits became more frequent—his presents more valuable—and their friendship thickened every day.

Mr. Hope got his friends' affairs adjusted—disposed of the business at Madame Le Fort's desire to a Liverpool gentleman, who retained his sons because he found them useful in the office—saw the widow safely embarked on her passage to New Orleans, where she meant to live among her own relations—and came South to do what he could for Leiton. To that end he followed Doctor Monro's example, and made the round of the country gentry. Mr. Hope was better received, for they all knew and respected him, but every squire and every magistrate believed in his cousin's guilt, and he had no evidence to shake their opinions. He visited Leiton, advised, cheered, and assisted him in the preparations for his defence; and, as usual in all times of Herbert's tribulation, the bonds of their friendship tightened and they understood each other better, though Hope never left the old castle without casting back the same questioning and unsatisfied look he had given it from the London coach. He visited Herbert's sisters and mother—they had need of some kindly visitor, for their hearts and hopes were low; and as the winter wore to its end and her son's trial came nearer, the poor old lady, who had had so terrible a share in his Castleford experience, began to droop visibly. Her health had never recovered from the shock of that

midnight encounter, neither had her mind, but the apathy into which it had fallen seemed to protect her in a great measure from the misfortunes which now beset her family. She knew that Herbert was in Colchester gaol, and about to be tried for murder, yet the fact made little or no impression on her—it might be talked of in her presence without being noticed, though, when spoken to on the subject, she quietly assured people of his innocence, and that Providence would make it manifest. With that quiet conviction, which nothing could alter, Mrs. Leiton gradually sank into her last sickness. The doctor told her family it was such, though he could not exactly tell its particular name, except that it was a decline. Slowly and tranquilly the old woman went, day by day getting nearer to the house appointed; she sent Herbert her blessing, and advice to trust in Providence; after that she never cared to see anybody but Hope; he read the Bible to her—he comforted her girls, as she still called them—he promised to look after them when she was gone—closed her eyes one clear, cold evening, when they sat at needlework by her bed-side, and thought mamma was asleep—and he saw her laid down beside the physician in Kensington churchyard. Her sickness put an end to the controversy between the Leitons and the Munros, regarding the management of poor Jessie. Hope almost lost caste with the doctor and his family for insisting on her removal from the scene of her many trials to an establishment in the north of London, then in high repute for the cure of such cases. It was the opinion of her medical

adviser that it might be tried with advantage, it was Leiton's earnest desire; but the Monros had made up their minds that nothing could be done for her except in Castleford Hall, where they wanted an apology for remaining permanently. They got one in the course of that season. Herbert Windham's whooping-cough, which had so occupied them at Vasey's first visit, did not leave him for a considerable time; and then the puny child was so shaken and worn that it became evident he was going the way of his grandmother. They could not think of letting Jessie be moved till they saw if her poor child would live or die; and Miss Scott, though generally on Hope's side of the question, supported them in that resolution.

It did not serve them long. Poor Herbert Windham was taken to see his father one day, wrapped up in all manner of shawls, and in the faithful arms of Betsy Collins. He had been whining about his papa, but did not seem to know or care for him when they met; and Hope wondered, for many a day, at how little Leiton seemed affected.

"He won't keep you long out of Castleford, cousin," was his remark, when Betsy and the boy were gone. "I never thought that child would live, even when he looked strong and healthy in his first year; and latterly it was not desirable he should, for I know his brain would never be safe."

Betsy took him home, and they all agreed Herbert Windham had caught no cold by going to Colchester; but he grew weaker every day after, and on the Sunday succeeding his grandmother's funeral, when

the church-bell was calling the villagers to the morning service, and the Monros were assembled in the back-parlour at their Scottish devotions, the heir of Castleford Hall, whose birth had been celebrated with such festivity, and rejoiced over with such delight, passed out of the world in which his short sojourn had seen so little good, and slept his last sleep on poor Betsy's knee, as she sat singing a hymn to him by the nursery window.

Time progressed, and the Lent assizes, with that all-important trial, came on. Half the dwellers in Castleford were summoned as witnesses for the defence or the prosecution. All the servants that had ever done duty in the Hall since Leiton came into possession, were gathered out of town-house and country-seat as far as they could be found. Newspaper men from east, west, north, and south, came down upon Colchester, like ravens on a field of slain, with eyes, ears, and pens sharpened. The court-house could not contain the crowd that thronged to it on the day the case was opened. It was the only capital one in the calendar; and the interest of it exceeded anything of the kind with which the county had been favoured in the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

The jury were all Essex gentlemen, believed to be most fairly chosen—for not one of them was challenged; and Herbert Leiton, who had transacted county business and exchanged hospitalities with them, stood at the bar, and heard himself indicted, in the usual form, for feloniously killing, and causing to perish, Harriet Leiton, on the seventh day of

December, 18—. His mother had gone to the grave not a fortnight before; his only child had followed her within the same week; the wife for whom he had risked so much sat at home in a hopeless eclipse of reason; his own position was as terrible as man could be placed in—yet those accumulated misfortunes seemed to have given his mind a nerve and a dignity it never showed before. Leiton had never faced the small remark and criticisms of the world with half the calm courage which spoke in his voice and countenance as, under the thousand eyes of that crowded court, he looked up to the bench and said, “Not guilty, my Lord.”

Leiton was tried before Baron Cresswick—an upright judge, and an able lawyer as ever occupied the seat of justice. In his days of junior barristerhood, he had danced at the birth-day parties given in Saville Row, but in his upward course he had lost sight of the Leitons, perhaps forgot their existence—rising men never have good memories—and it was probable his Lordship never guessed that the man he was trying, and might have to sentence, was the same whose natal day he had helped to celebrate.

The counsel for the Crown was a Mr. Lawford. He had been Leiton's fellow-student at Oxford; and whether the gentleman was cognisant of the fact or not, he showed considerable ability in setting forth the case against him.

The defence was conducted by Mr. Fitzgerald, the rising barrister who had done Hope such good service. He had two assistants, but they were men



of no mark ; and everybody knew the heavy work was done by Barrett Vasey. Hope came with him, as Leiton's friend—the only man who appeared in that character—and Vasey said he never had better help in court. They had persuaded Leiton's sisters to stay at home, knowing that the unfortunate women could only give trouble. They were represented by the Reverend Pilgrim, in the most out-of-sight corner he could find. Doctor Monro squeezed in beside him, to learn the will of Providence concerning his son-in-law. Mr. Johnstone sat in front of them. Simon Frazer left his water-power to hear how the case went with Annie's cousin. The Rothwells came, in the last remnant of the position, to see their enemy convicted ; and the general expectation of that event, with its consequences, might have been traced in the respectful recognition of people who had passed them by many a time in Caroline Street. Sharp Keightley led their march. The best judges of grandeur would have been puzzled to say whether he or Russell the mayor had been made the greater man by Leiton's arrest. But as those two suns moved in different hemispheres of the Colchester world, they could afford to let each other shine.

From the beginning of that trial people saw it would not be soon over. Mr. Lawford's opening statement lasted nearly two hours, and was thought a masterpiece of accusing eloquence—for he told the court nothing but what every soul in it knew before they came there. The learned counsel went over the history of Leiton's first marriage ; the fact that his wife was an heiress,

that he had a life-interest in her property in case she died before him, that he had come into possession of Castleford by the death of a relation, and expended his wife's money in improving the impoverished estate to an extent which called forth frequent remonstrances from the trustees. Then Mr. Lawford informed the jury that the unhappy man had so far forgotten the principles of rectitude as to carry on an intrigue with a young and attractive female of an inferior position, till her friends were obliged to remove the girl out of his reach; and, a few months after, the injured lady whose fortune had enriched him, disappeared in a manner so unaccountable and mysterious that strong suspicions had attached to Leiton, and popular superstition, as he presumed most of the gentlemen were aware, had circulated tales of a nightly apparition being seen about his house. Mr. Lawford did not mean to endorse the terrors of vulgar credulity; but he was not prepared to say that Providence might not employ extraordinary, or even supernatural, agency, for the discovery of so black a crime. The true proverb, that murder will out, had, however, been proved by a train of more tangible circumstances, and an amount of corroborative evidence which must appear conclusive to every sane mind.

No one, he said, felt more deeply than himself for the situation of the unhappy prisoner, who had occupied the position of a country gentleman, and sat on the county bench—perhaps was personally known to many of them—and had been thought an estimable member of society; but they must remember that the claims of public justice stood above all human sympa-

thies and feelings, and do their duty to their country and its laws.

Then commenced the examination of witnesses, and their name was legion. Ned Coster led the van, and his story was clear evidence. He had been "gettin' sand for his cottage floor out of Kitscove, 'cause it was whitest there, and found a skeleton buried in it. He thought it best to speak to the Squire in a private way, and get his advice, for fear of bein' brought into trouble. A poor man like him didn't know what to do;" and then Ned related word for word the conversation between himself and Leiton, interspersed with recollections of "how confounded like and frightened the Squire looked; how unwilling he, Ned, was to do the business of buryin', but the pay, and the fear of offendin' the Squire, made him undertake it; and he never was so terrified in all his life as when the two policemen tuck him with the sack on his back."

His daughter Katy came next, and fully confirmed his statements. She had been "just takin' a walk in the park when she heard somebody speakin' in the clump of firs, and in course she couldn't help listenin'." Mr. Lawford made a great deal of that witness, particularly when, in the course of her examination, Katy let out, as it were by accident, that "when she was gettin' out of the fir clump, oncommon frightened, her eye cotched the ribbon of Miss Hope's bonnet, and she knewed the young lady was listenin' too."

He called the attention of judge and jury to that statement, proved by the evidence of the housemaid that Miss Hope was out at the time, and pressed on their consideration the fact that she had been smuggled away

and concealed in order to defeat the ends of justice. On the counsel's special demand Mr. Hope was summoned to the witness-box ; but that emergency had been provided for. It was agreed between him and Vasey that, to save Hope's conscience, he should not know where Annie was—and these two men could trust each other, which is not a common case. Mr. Lawford, therefore, made nothing of him ; he did not know his daughter's present residence—though he admitted that it was his wish she should not appear, and no cross-examination could extract further intelligence from the prepared American.

There followed an immense mass of evidence from the servants who had been at the Hall when the first Mrs. Leiton disappeared ; the gentlemen who had searched for her on the banks of the Stour, and found her bonnet floating in the brambles below Kitscove—that fact was brought out in strong relief—the tenants and friends who had helped to drag the river, the jurymen who had held the inquest on the found body—the coroner was gone where no human inquest can reach—the undertaker and his assistants. Mr. Stoneman stood in great terror of tin kettles being beaten at his door now, and came out very strong on the large thumbs of the deceased, insisting that it must have been Susy Tramp dressed in a lady's clothes, “for nobody never saw her after.”

This complicated the case still more. The poor Leitons were summoned, and, in spite of themselves, they so far corroborated Stoneman's evidence, that the judge gave an order for the opening of the vault, and a medical examination of the body.

It was done as far as possible at that distance of time, and Stoneman was proved to be correct; for the thumb bones were beyond the common size, which all her friends knew to be unlike the first Mrs. Leiton.

Lawford contended that here was overwhelming evidence in favour of the skeleton which Ned Coster had been commissioned to bury being that of the missing lady, and even suggested that the other body might have been dressed for the purpose, before the ceremony of recognition was gone through. He also brought proofs that Leiton had good or bad reason for getting rid of his first wife. The servants of "The Angel," in Bury, the Carlans, one and all, and even Miss Scott and the Maypole, were placed in the witness-box, and obliged to testify more or less to what the learned counsel called the secret intrigue—by-the-way, it had never been so difficult to make the lady of Selkirk Cottage hear, since she first took to a trumpet; and Betty stood to it that "Miss Jessie had never done anything on-proper."

Mr. Hope was once more called on, but when he assured the counsel he had received Miss Monro into his house as a visitor about the time specified, and ventured to ask that learned gentleman if it appeared probable to him that a father would have allowed his only daughter to associate with her, had the young lady been of doubtful reputation, Mr. Lawford was so perfectly satisfied, that he never demanded his presence in the witness-box again.

Counsellor Fitzgerald was allowed to have won his legal spurs at Leiton's trial. He admitted that cir-

cumstances were strong against his client, and so they had been against many an innocent man, of which he quoted many striking examples. He entreated the jury to keep their minds unbiassed by popular report or current gossip—reminded them that the love of justice and fair play was one of the proudest distinctions of Englishmen—and undertook to show them that the charge had been got up from motives of private revenge and individual interest. Fitzgerald disputed the ground, inch by inch, with his learned antagonist, insisted on formalities—caught him out of rule—cross-examined his witnesses, and showed such a knowledge of the slippery places in their evidence and antecedents as astonished not only them, but the judge and jury.

Ned Coster, it was proved, through an unfortunate slip of the Irishman, had discoursed to Neil Carlan about the hidden bones a full fortnight before the day he pretended to have discovered them. The Rothwells' maid, who had been so carefully sent to her aunt's, testified to Mr. Keightley's visits and courtship of Miss Augusta, and swore to the fact of having seen Coster knocking at the door about ten o'clock in the night before the said discovery, when she was going for her supper-beer. The attorney himself was obliged to admit that he had arranged with Ned on the subject of the bones, but only for the sake of public justice, on which the counsel commented by reminding him that Mr. Leiton's removal would let the Bank-property of his first wife descend to the Rothwells, and begged the jury to observe the disinterested nature of the gentleman's zeal.

The mayor fared little better, for he was not so clever at evading questions; and all who have had the pleasure of standing in the witness-box know that every man's senses are not about him there. Mr. Russell was made to tell how the attorney had stirred him up—how the police were sent to arrest Ned on his representation—and Fitzgerald contended that this was a clear case of conspiracy against his client. He proved, by the evidence of Doctor Adams, that the skeleton on which so much stress had been laid could not be that of the first Mrs. Leiton, for it must have been buried in the sand at least twenty years, and five had not elapsed since her disappearance. He insisted on the irregularity of the proceedings, that no inquest had been held, according to law and common custom, and that the magistrates had allowed their minds to be prejudiced by slanderous rumours, and acted inconsiderately in granting a warrant on such inconclusive evidence. His client's conduct, though highly imprudent, could be easily understood. He knew himself to be the subject of injurious rumours, originating no doubt with those who had an interest in his ruin; he also knew what seeming confirmation would be given to such rumours by Coster's discovery, and thus fell into the snare laid for him, by sanctioning the private interment of the ghastly relics.

Backward over every suspicious circumstance Fitzgerald went, disputing, questioning, explaining away. Various persons who had seen or heard of Mrs. Herbert on the day of her disappearance were summoned. The farmer's boy, now grown to a ploughman, who had met her on the banks of the Stour, still remem-

bered the circumstance. Katy Coster recollected her going to Ivywood—the Squire's going out about half-an-hour after, and “ axin’ very particular where she had gone, and biddin’ herself not to say he had been axin.” Mrs. Mildmay deposed, though unwillingly, to the cries she had heard from the rising river; and Cross, the postman, was clear on the Squire passing by her door within the same hour. Yet a respectable old nurseryman, living on the Bury road, and summoned for the defence, testified, with equal certainty, to having seen him passing his house five miles from Castleford that afternoon.

For seven days the trial had gone on, and every day the interest of it only increased. The country papers made room for its voluminous reports, by leaving everything else but the markets unnoticed. Additional stage-coaches and waggon were started on the road between London and Colchester, to carry the curious to the scene of action. Additional police were required to keep the crowd who thronged into and around the court-house, in order. In Castleford, in Colchester, and throughout Essex, nothing else was done but talk about the Leiton case. The mass of evidence was so great, and so conflicting, that people's minds were divided on the probable verdict. Bets were taken at the London clubs for and against Leiton's escape. Notwithstanding the discovery of motives made in the witness-box, as regarded Keightley and Co., his guilt remained firmly impressed on the public mind; and though sensible people would not own it, the belief was powerfully confirmed by the numbers who declared on oath that they had seen the appar-



tion of the murdered woman. Baron Cresswick said publicly that no case so singular in all its details had ever come under his experience; and, in private, after dinner with the mayor and the sheriff, that no jury could possibly agree in a verdict on it.

The reports that went abroad by type and tongue were uncertain and contradictory as the evidence. One journal assured the public that Leiton had confessed his crime to the chaplain of the gaol. There was a rumour among the Colchester shops that Susy Tramp was discovered living in London, and about to turn King's evidence against him, for the public kindly set the woman down as an accomplice. She had been advertised and searched for by the police in vain; her brother, Charlie, had been brought into court—but as he could not be made to understand the nature of an oath, the judge dismissed him again to the Workhouse. His quondam mistress, after keeping her bed for several days in order to avoid the witness-box, was at length put into it; but of all its occupants she furnished the smallest amount of matter for prosecution or defence, and had to be turned two or three times from the recital of her private woes and steadfast belief in her dear cousin's innocence. Unfortunate Leiton, he stood there day after day hearing the history of his private life raked up—the remarks, surmises, whispers, and observations which had been made on him and his for years past; heard the evidence of his friends and his enemies. Who shall say which was the worse to hear?—and yet, whether the man's nature had grown strong or blunt in that desperate grapple with his evil destiny, none could tell; but his composure and calmness con-

tinued to be the theme of newspaper eulogy, and Hope assured Vasey he had never thought so much of his cousin. The friend and the friendly solicitor had a terrible amount of business. Their days were spent in the court, and their nights in preparing for it; but, latterly, Hope missed Vasey sometimes from the "Crown," where they stayed—found he had been somewhere on business not mentioned; saw him receive messages and callers he knew nothing of; and on the eighth day entered the court to find he was not there, though he had promised to meet him, and hear Fitzgerald putting Ned Coster through a second examination regarding the when and how of his discovery, about which the counsel were not satisfied. The proceedings had not fairly commenced when a man out of the crowd handed Fitzgerald one note, and Hope another. The latter contained only,

"DEAR HOPE.—Go for your daughter as quick as you can—the sooner you can get her home the better for our case—and Leiton will be saved yet. She is at 'The Reaper,' in Moorside. It lies on the old north road, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, fifteen miles from Glossop. The shortest way is right through Derby. Never mind who knows it now; but, for Heaven's sake, make haste!

"BARRETT VASEY."

As Hope finished reading he looked up at the counsellor. There was an expression of amazement in Fitzgerald's face not often seen there; but the barrister resumed his composure instantly, spoke a few words to his

coadjutors—which only they could hear—and addressed the judge :

“My Lord, I have just received an intimation of important, I may say conclusive evidence, in my client’s favour, which the hand of Providence seems to be bringing to light ; and, long as we have occupied your Lordship’s time and attention with this trial, I earnestly request that, for the sake of public justice and the sparing of innocent blood, you will adjourn the case for one week, at the end of which time I believe we shall be able to prove my client not guilty.”

“I will remand him till the next assizes, to give you a better chance,” said Baron Cresswick.

“Pardon me, my Lord, I wish to save an innocent man, on whom heavy family misfortunes have fallen, the anxiety and suspense of three additional months in the county goal. Let me entreat your Lordship to grant us a week’s delay, and proceed with the other cases in the calendar.”

“Very well, Mr. Fitzgerald,” said the judge, after a brief consultation with his friends on the bench—by-the-bye, it was filled with the magnates of the county—“it is rather unusual—perhaps out of rule—but we wish to give you every opportunity of clearing your client, if you can ; and therefore adjourn the case till this day week. Let the Jury be bound over to appear in the usual form, and the prisoner be remanded till that day, when, I trust, this extraordinary case will come to a close.”

What a clearing-out there was of that court-house the moment those preliminaries were arranged ! What talk—what wonder—what rumours and explanations—

went through town and country regarding the evidence which the hand of Providence was bringing to light ! Herbert Leiton had been seen to look up, as his counsellor announced it, with a flash of wild joy in his eye ; but the next moment his face took an expression of positive fear, and the servants of the "The Crown" told how his cousin Hope had rushed in with an order for a chaise and post-horses, and had driven out of Colchester, telling nobody but the postilion where he was going.

## CHAPTER X.

## MOORSIDE REVELATIONS.

THE springs of events, like those of rivers, are often far from the scene of their development; and to trace out the cause of that dead-lock in Leiton's trial which amazed Castleford, astonished Colchester, and threw the murder-loving public into a fever of suspense and conjecture, our narrative must return to Annie Hope's sojourn at Moorside, after the departure of Miss Leslie on her northern progress. That unexpected event did astonish Mr. Vasey's niece, but could not occupy her mind so much as the coming and the talk of old Johnstone. Strange and odd as he had always been, often as she had consulted the almanac in search of a lunar connection for him, Annie believed, in her secret soul, that all he said was true, except what happened to be against her father; and of that she knew there must be some explanation involving the old man himself. But he had given her news of Simon—the best she had ever heard, and Annie thought the

truest. Time was making the false grounds of their quarrel and estrangement plain to her also. They had arisen from mistakes on both sides, and Simon had got the worst of the play. Did not Annie remember how sharply she had taken him up that Sunday?—how she and her father had agreed on his being a base, fortune-hunting fellow, and given him over to Miss Leslie and her thirty thousand? Yet Simon had been true and faithful all the time. Misled by his family prejudices, perhaps by her rival's insinuations—for in the snares laid secretly Annie believed as well as in the asking declared by old Johnstone—he had spoken offensively, and repented of it—in spite of that stern letter of dismissal, in spite of long separation; he had his chance in business, and Mr. Leslie's patronage, rather than put another in her place. But things must take their course now. They were separated by time, by circumstances, by mutual heartburning; and the only prospect of better times they might ever see had been cast away in her refusal of old Johnstone's offer. Annie had a conviction that he would keep his word this time—that he would never speak to her more, nor do anything for Simon; yet the girl did not rue the course she had taken—to cleave to the man she had called her father so long, whether he were such or not. Her doubt on that subject was growing to something like belief now. She would know it all if they ever met again; and if it were so that she was not Hope's daughter, for the love and care she had known, Annie would be a daughter to him, and never leave him for riches or poverty—no, not even for Simon Frazer, under Johnstone's conditions. But the

thought lay hard and heavy on her heart—how ill she had rewarded his constancy.

The landlady of the “Reaper” thought Mr. Vasey’s niece had been looking more than usually sober for some days, and supposed she must be feeling Moorside lonely, in spite of Annie’s declarations that she was never so much at home in all her life, when a certain Monday on which Mrs. Grimshaw gave her maids a holiday came round. It occurred only once a quarter—but holidays have never been plenty in Yorkshire—and the maids made the most of it by getting up at three and starting at five, in the best farm-cart, driven by Jonah Jenkins, and containing—besides provisions for the day, which their mistress bestowed with no sparing hand—the wives and children of the labourers, all bent on helping them to spend their holiday and make their private purchases in Glossop. Of course the men of the farm trudged behind the cart to take care of its precious contents, bring all home safe, and get share of the holiday themselves. Except three babies left in charge of a grandmother in one of the cottages, not a soul remained in Moorside house or farm but Mrs. Grimshaw and Annie.

“Never mind,” said the strong-hearted and strong-armed landlady, “we have Watch here. He’s the best dog in the West Riding, as all the gentlemen that ever came to the ‘Reaper’ have told me. No tramps or rascals ever come this way. It’s too far among the moors for them. Bad folks always keep near the towns, my dear. We’ll have a nice, quiet day. I’m going to spin that white lambs’-wool to knit you some nice winter-stockings before you go. I hope that won’t

be just yet, child ; I'll be lonely like when you leave. But I'm forgetting to tell you that Farmer Burnley, who passed here yesterday, taking home his new plough-irons, brought me a newspaper from the postmaster's wife in Glossop—she's a very respectable woman, and a good friend of mine ; and sent it on account of that wonderful case in Essex—the Squire that murdered his wife, you know ? She says there's a whole page about the first day's trial. You'll read it to me, Annie, while I spin the wool. My own eyes ain't good enough for reading now, except the Bible at a time. And it's not just my eyes either. I'm not so old as that. But learning was not so common in my young days as it is now. And they do print such hard words in those newspapers."

Annie promised to make out the hard words. It was something to get news through any channel ; for neither word nor sign had come from her southern friends. And she was afraid to write, even to her father, lest the letter might fall into adverse hands. When they had done what Mrs. Grimshaw called settling the house, piled up the hearth with peat and bog-wood—for the day, though reckoned fine on the moors, was bitterly cold—and set the lambs'-wool in order, the good woman brought the newspaper out of her safest cupboard, remarking that the last she had was all about the crowning of George the Fourth. She lent it to the farmers for twenty miles round, and it served them for nearly a twelvemonth. But, by all accounts, that Squire's trial was a deal more entertaining. The paper was the *York Advertiser*, a great authority among the northern counties at the time ;



and, besides a full report of proceedings on the first day of Leiton's trial, it contained a pretty accurate account of his history, family, and connections, illustrated by a picture of Castleford Hall, which might have served for any country mansion from the Humber to the Thames.

Seated on a low stool, close by Mrs. Grimshaw's spinning-wheel, in that quaint, lonely house among the moorlands, Annie experienced what many an individual of different character and circumstances has experienced—the safety and shelter of an *alias*. Under its shadow she read, without compunction or difficulty, the accusing counsel's speech, the Costers' evidence, the comments on her own disappearance, and even her father's examination. Mrs. Grimshaw listened with the interest becoming a murder, and pronounced the Squire guilty beyond a doubt. "They're keeping that young woman out of the way, you see, for fear the truth of these poor people's story should be made out. But he'll not escape, Annie—Providence never allows such crimes to go unpunished."

Annie thought proper to pass at once to the editorial article on Leiton's antecedents, which Mrs. Grimshaw said the postmaster's wife had sent her word to read particularly—it was so very informing. Mr. Vasey's niece read it from beginning to end; but, while bending over the paper that her face might not be seen as she recounted particulars regarding the Leitons, the Monros, and the Hopes, the complete cessation of the spinning made her glance up, and there sat the landlady of the "Reaper," with the wool in her fingers, and her whole face and frame fixed in amazed attention,

as if she had been listening to some revelation of destiny. The moment she caught Annie's eye Mrs. Grimshaw gave her wheel a turn and tried to spin on, but the next moment she was in the same fixed attitude. Her reader took the precaution not to be seen observing again; but she could see the honest woman lift up her hands like one affirming judgment, shake her head, and mutter to herself, "Nothing better could happen them."

The article was finished—the paper contained nothing more of interest for Mrs. Grimshaw. She said it was a wonderful case if people knew the bottom of it, set her wheel aside, got the dinner ready, and went about her household business as usual. But the good woman continued silent and thoughtful—the shaking of her head, and the lifting up of her hands, occurred in the midst of domestic operations; and when she sat down again to her spinning, the wool passed slowly through her fingers, and her thoughts seemed far away, but not in cheerful company. Annie had never known what to make of that woman; but, partly to cheer her up, and partly in hopes of getting some light on the strange effect produced by the reading of the *York Advertiser*, she broached the subject, hazardous as it was to herself, by saying, "So you think that Squire is guilty?"

"I think he is," said Mrs. Grimshaw, looking at her wool. "Will you make me the cap you promised out of the clear muslin?—you'll find it in my second drawer." Annie professed her willingness, brought the muslin, cut out the cap, and sat sewing away at the opposite side of the fire, while the burr of the wheel and

the ticking of the clock were the only sounds to be heard in or about the "Reaper" for one full hour. Then Mrs. Grimshaw looked up from her wheel and said, "Annie, this is a wicked world."

"I believe it is," said Annie.

"You believe right, child; and I'll tell you what I've been thinking of, because you're a discreet, sensible girl, not given to clash and clatter, as they say in Scotland, where I came from—and it takes a weight off one's mind to tell a weary old story of the sort. Besides, there's a lesson in it, and that's good for young folk. You mind what you read me this forenoon about the family that Squire Leiton had married into after he did the deed, and got rid of his first wife? Annie, I know that family, and I tell you it's the sins of the fathers visited on the children, as the Second Commandment says they will be. Nothing good could happen the Monros, though, if it had been the will of Providence, I wish Doctor George had got the fright himself, and not his innocent daughter. Listen, Annie, and I'll tell you the whole of it:—

"In my young days I was brought up with an uncle in Glasgow. His name was Henderson, and so was mine—for he was my father's brother. I was well connected, though the Grimshaws made little of me, because I came here a servant lass. But my father owned a spinning-mill in Paisley when there were not many there; and I have a second cousin this day, a sound and godly minister—the Reverend Cameron Frazer, of the Scotch Church in London Wall. As I said, I was brought up by my uncle, for my father and mother died early. He was a well-to-do man,

and much respected in the Salt Market, which was a genteel street then. His business was muslin-weaving. He kept six handlooms—the power ones had not come up—and had his muslins wrought into robes for the great house of Campbell & Co., which still leads the muslin trade, I'm told. Robes, my dear, wrought with the needle were the tip-top dresses for ladies at that time. They wore them at weddings and balls, and all sorts of grand gatherings—and twenty guineas was a small price for a fine one. Those that could work well could live decently by it. My uncle had a good many in his employment. The best hands among them were an aunt and a niece, who lived together, and had come from Ireland. Their name was Desmond—the aunt was called Miss Grace, and the niece Miss Honor. They put up to have come of a great Irish family, whose estates were lost in some rebellion or other; and I think it was true, for the aunt had a grand high look, like a born gentlewoman. She was tall and dark, and something foreign-like. They said she had been educated at a convent in France, though the Desmonds were Protestants—I mean Episcopalians, of the High Church kind—non-juring people, as they used to be called. Maybe it was in the convent she learned to do such fine work, for nothing could surpass the robes Miss Grace put out of her hand; and I have heard my uncle say she had no equal at the needle in Glasgow, except her niece Honor. All that saw her allowed she was a beauty. The gentlemen in the street, and the very boys at play, used to turn and look after her, though a print-gown and a straw-hat were all she had on, and

that was poor dress in Glasgow. I don't want to make you vain, child—handsome is that handsome does—and the fair face is nothing to the honest heart; but oh! Annie, you are her very picture, I thought it was herself coming back to me the day you stepped out of the chaise—and I like you for her sake, for I never loved man or woman as I did Honor Desmond. We got acquainted first by her coming for muslin—the fine robes were always wrought, you see, before they were bleached, so my uncle gave it out to the workers as they came; and none of them were low or common people, they couldn't do such work. I have seen ministers' daughters and bailies' sisters among them, but the Desmonds were at the top of that tree. Besides being the best workers, they were well-bred and well-doing, lived in a genteel flat in the Cowcaddens—I'm told that place is little thought of now—but in my youth it was respectable; they kept their own servant, too, she had come with them from Ireland, and her name was Nora. I don't know whether they or she were the proudest of their great family. I'm not sure that Miss Grace didn't think it condescension to associate with us; but my uncle took kindly to the Desmonds from the time we first knew them, and I took to Honor as I have never taken to anybody since—not even my old man, though he was kind, and married me in spite of the Grimshaws. She was so good, so clever, so light-hearted, so full of fun, so free from spite and envy—I'm sure some of the Glasgow girls had enough of them to her—but that was for her beauty. I never grudged Honor that nor anything else; and she was good to me, she taught me satin-stitch and tambouring

—she wanted to teach me French, too, though I spoke broad Scotch then like all the respectable people in Glasgow—you see I took to the English since I came here, just to be equal with the Grimshaws. Honor had received the best of schooling in Dublin; she said her aunt would have sent her to France, only for the war—it was going on then, and we thought would never be done. I had little learning of any sort, but we were of the same age; she lived with her aunt, and I lived with my uncle, and we were always together. When all my housekeeping business was done—you see my uncle was a widower, and I managed the place—nothing would keep me from running over to the Cowcaddens, to get Honor out for a walk, if I could, or sit by her at the frame, if there was something to be finished. I know her aunt loved her as well as any mother; but Miss Grace was a strict, high-minded lady—if she said the work was to be done on any particular day, done it must be; and Honor stood in fear and dread of her, though she told me her aunt had been always kind, and took her when her father was killed in the Irish Rebellion, and her mother died of grief one month after. There was a brother, too, his name was Morris, but an aunt by the mother's side had brought him up; he and Miss Grace did not agree, because she said he had no religion; Honor said it was because he was liberal-minded—she told me, too, that he was one of the best brothers, and a great scholar at Trinity College; but I never saw him, for he didn't come to the Cowcaddens, on account of the disagreement.

“Well, Annie, that Irish girl and I were always together, and told each other all our secrets. Mine

was about my uncle's son, Robby—red Robby we called him, for his hair always reminded me of the burning fiery furnace into which the three children were cast, in the Book of Daniel. Goodness knows he was no beauty, but Robby had a mighty conceit of himself, and wouldn't stay about his father's house because the old man wouldn't give up the whole management of muslin looms and weavers to him; so he went to be a clerk with Campbell and Company. My uncle generally asked him to dinner on Sundays, and all that ever passed between them regarding business was the question—'Robby, how is the world using you?' and the reply, 'Very well, sir; I hope you are not troubled with the rheumatics this season?' At the Sunday dinners Robby made up to me, but being young and foolish, I rather disdained him, and that made the creature spiteful. He's not married yet I'm told, but when my uncle died, poor man, without making a will, which I can't say was right of him, Robby came in for all, and would have turned me out, but I saved him that trouble by packing up my two boxes and walking off to the Lanark Tryst, where I took service with Farmer Wilson's father and his good wife, and came with them to the Fell farm early in the next spring. Mr. Grimshaw was an acquaintance of theirs, and that's how I came to be mistress of 'The Reaper.' Providence has turned the malice of enemies to many a one's advantage, as it did to his who was sold into Egypt.

"That happened long after what I'm going to tell you about Honor. She had a secret, too. Sandy Monro was a student at Glasgow College then—a clever, likely lad, and an acquaintance of ours, though the

Monros were from Edinburgh, and we West-country people. Their father had been a writer, and left them some money; but there were three daughters and two sons to be portioned out of it, and my uncle always said it would make small divisions among so many. Their mother had been very genteelly brought up in Edinburgh. I mind her well. She was a hard-faced woman, and a wonderful manager; all her thought was how to get the family on in the world, and keep up appearances in the most saving way.

"The eldest son, George—Geordy, as we called him—was much of her mind, and they were the only executors of the father's will. Everything was in their power. They married off the girls as quickly as it could be done, without regard to liking or choice. One of them got a farmer at Rastilrig, the greatest miser in all the Lothians. The other was buckled to a Highland drover, who couldn't write his own name; and the third—poor girl! they said she cried for three days before the wedding—was packed off to the West Indies with a ne'er-do-weel that his decent Greenock family wanted to get settled somewhere far enough from them. Sandy was the youngest, and he was sent to Glasgow College to be made a doctor, when the Monros came West, and set themselves up in Bothwell. Geordy was educated there, because it was cheaper than Edinburgh. He was a doctor, too, you see, and opened a shop for drugs and practice—they say his mother helped him in both—and Sandy was to be partner when he obtained his degree.

"One of the Hendersons had married a Monro; I'm



not sure when—it was some time after the Forty-five—but it made an acquaintance between us and them. My uncle asked them to teas and suppers; he was fond of company, honest man. The Desmonds were asked, too, and it was at our house that Honor struck up with Sandy. For nearly a twelvemonth nobody knew it but myself. I would have gone to the gallows rather than betray her secret, and there was need for keeping it.

“Sandy lodged with a Mrs. Craig, in the High Street. She was a widow of one of the old Virginia merchants, who left her well-provided for, and took in nobody but himself, because she was above letting; but everybody said the lad might draw in his stool and sit down there, though she might have been his mother; and the Monros had set their hearts on making that match. Many a time I wondered they didn’t see where the lad’s heart was going; for if ever man loved woman, it seemed to me that he loved Honor. His very eyes appeared to dance for joy when he got a sight of her. Out or in, his contrivances to get beside the lass were wonderful. He wrote her letters, and he bought her presents, tight as they kept him; and Honor loved Sandy with all her heart. Oh! Annie, Annie! beware of young men, with their flattering words and their fair promises. Nothing else ever led that girl astray. There was no lightness or folly in her. I should as soon have thought of myself going wrong—ay, far sooner—than of Honor Desmond. She had so much sense, so much modesty and maidenly pride—and yet she did forget herself. Annie,

it's that makes me strict and watchful over young folks.

"They had been courting two years and more, and nobody knew it. Her aunt Grace would never have allowed such a thing. Sandy's people were set on his marrying Mrs. Craig, and he had one session yet to study before he could get his degree, the villain!—for that he must have been; but God has rewarded him according to his works long ago. I couldn't make it out, but Honor had grown downcast and frightened like. I couldn't get her to speak frank and friendly as she used to do about her troubles, ask how I would. At first I thought there had been an outcast between her and Sandy, for she couldn't talk of him without the tears coming into her eyes. Then I got half angry with her, for it seemed she was becoming shy and proud with me, and began to keep away from the house. But at last, Annie, I heard a whisper—it was from our servant Nancy, an honest girl, and not given to clash and clatter—that things were wrong indeed. She had not thought enough of me to tell it, Annie; that goes against my mind to this hour; but I would have sat on the cutty-stool with her, and the minute I could get out I run over to the Cowcaddens. There was nobody there but Nora and Miss Grace. I never saw such a changed woman as she looked; her face was twenty years older, and I had seen her but a week before. At the sight of me she started as if she had seen a ghost. I had got into her room before Nora could prevent me, and my first word was asking for Honor.

"Honor is no company for an honest girl now,"

said Miss Grace, looking cold and hard as the very stone. 'Go home, child, and take care of your own good name;' and then all at once the proud woman gave way, and fell a-crying as if her heart would break. It breaks mine, Annie, to think of it yet, and, poor Honor! she fled away to hide herself in Greenock, where her foster-mother lived among the poor Irish, who always come over there, and don't improve the town.

"I went home nearly out of my judgment, and begged of my uncle to do something for her. Willie Henderson, as all Glasgow called him, was a merciful man, wherefore I hope he has obtained mercy. He said human nature was fallible, and the case was not so bad, but a minister might mend it. He sent for Sandy Monro the same evening—Annie, it was nothing but the fear of making bad worse that kept me from putting on the kettle to scald him, the minute he entered the house; yet the lad was to be pitied in a manner. Before a whisper came out, he had gone to his mother and brother, told them the case—ay! the very worst of it, and begged them for pity's sake to let him marry Honor, and give him a trifle of his father's money to begin housekeeping, for he knew her aunt had no fortune to give her; but they would consent to neither, and—what wicked things worldliness will make people do! his own mother urged Sandy to leave the girl who had trusted him too far, marry Mrs. Craig, and then he would be able to make a provision for his child, which they said was all Honor deserved. My uncle went to reason with them next day, but he might as well as

reasoned with Ailsa Crag—and hadn't they plenty of excuses? One of their family to marry a girl brought up next door to Popery, with an Irish rebel for her father, they couldn't hear of the like, and did their best to lay all the blame on Honor. My uncle brought their minister to talk with them—he was Doctor Burnett, a dry stick of the moderate school, and gave himself little trouble; but my uncle told them honestly they were doing the deil's work, laying a stumbling-block before their own flesh and blood; he told Sandy it would be better for him to caw pirms in a spinning-mill with the bonnie lass he was more than pledged to, than marry the old, rich widow, and bring the judgments of broken faith upon him; and offered to lend the lad money to begin the world on, if he would get decently married. I must say Sandy was ready and willing, but the hot blood of Ireland is always doing mischief—the very night that was settled between him and my uncle, a man broke into Sandy's room, with a loaded pistol in his hand—it was Honor's brother, and, by the mercy of Providence, his pistol missed fire, and Sandy saved himself by getting out upon the roof, for his room was in the top flat; and they say the vengeful man pursued him over half the houses of High Street, and made his own escape by scrambling down a scaffold the masons had put up at the corner of the Old Vennel. Sandy got such a fright by that chase, that he fled the country, they said, for downright fear of Morris Desmond. As far as I heard, he first went to London, and then out to the isle of Cuba, where he had an old reprobate of an uncle, who

had come to be a planter there, by driving negroes, and doing all manner of wicked work for gain. Annie, his name was Johnstone, and I'm wondering if that odd, old man that talked so against your uncle Vasey could be any relation to him ; there's a kind of a likeness to the Monros in his face, and he looks old enough to be the man ; Sandy went out, too, in hopes of being provided for—they said he was his namesake, and the old man had no lawful heirs ; but whatever hopes Sandy had were all cut short, for he died of the yellow-fever, six weeks after his landing at Havannah. His sister and her ne'er-do-weel husband heard the news in Jamaica, and sent it home to the Monros. I was told that the mother never was herself after ; they kept it quiet, but she went out of her mind in a manner—couldn't be trusted in the shop, and wouldn't sleep in her room without the servant-lass, for fear of Sandy coming to look after his share of the money ; she lived only three years, and died talking to the dead lad about marrying Mrs. Craig and leaving Honor. Poor Honor ! nobody could tell for a long time what had become of her. I tried hard, but could neither see nor hear from her, till at last she sent me a lock of her hair, and a farewell letter, bidding me to think of her as one dead and gone, for none that ever knew her would hear tell of her more. She sailed out to America, when she was ill fit for the voyage ; and her foster-mother left five married sons in Greenock, and sailed out with her. I have kept the letter and the lock of hair ; and, oh ! Annie, she might have thought more of my true love and friendship than to let the shame keep her from

me. The sorrow of that happening has never left me, and never will. But I heard of Honor long after. A poor Irishwoman who came here one harvest time, and knew her foster-mother, told me she had heard, from a letter the old woman sent to her sons, that a gentleman in America had married Miss Desmond for pure love; she said he was a Frenchman, but did not mention his name. Whatever it was, or whatever was his nation, I have prayed for that man night and morning this many a year; but three harvests after, it was just before my old man was called, the same woman came here to work again, and told me that Honor was dead and gone, and so was her child, though she had been living in a grand way somewhere near New Orleans, and had the best husband in the world.

“Now, there’s what made me say that no good could happen the Monros! The family they wronged are all dead and gone. Morris Desmond was so searched for by the police, and so reported in the Hue and Cry, that he never dared go back to his college in Dublin, or be seen at all within the three kingdoms. He kept himself hidden about Glasgow and Greenock—nobody knew how. But, no doubt, it was among the Irish, and at last got off in an American ship. Maybe he was going to look after his sister—though I’m not sure which of them went first. But Morris never saw the other side of the ocean, for the ship was lost off the west coast of his own country—where they say the rocks are terrible—and every soul on board perished. Miss Grace had left the Cowcaddens before that happened.

Though she could have maintained herself well by working the robes without Honor, neither my uncle nor anybody else could persuade her to stay in Glasgow. She packed up her all one night, and we never knew what became of her and Nora; but there was a report—I can't vouch for the truth of it—that the shame and the sorrow weighed so much on the old lady's mind, and maybe weakened it, that she turned a Catholic all out. You see Nora was one, and they both contrived to get over to France in spite of the war, and back to the convent where Miss Grace received her education. There, it was said, she died one year after her coming—in what the Romanists thought great sanctity—and Nora, having been with her to the last—there's wonderful constancy in these Irish sometimes—stayed in the convent to pray beside her grave—and maybe the poor soul is praying there yet, in her Papistical darkness. They are all dead and gone. So are most of the Monros. But Dr. George—the worst of them, in my opinion—lives on, and has never done well, for all the places he has tried in England and America. And now you see what has happened to his daughter.”

Mrs. Grimshaw's reflections were here interrupted by the loud barking of the dog in the porch. Annie rose to see what it meant, for there was nobody within sight. Yet Watch continued to bark for several minutes, as if at some invisible enemy.

“What on earth troubles the dog? I never knew him to bark without reason. They're never good that don't show themselves. But I'll make it out,” said the

energetic landlady of "The Reaper," getting up from her wheel and seizing a stout stick always kept in the corner by way of household arms. With it in her hand she sallied forth, made a rapid round of her house and farm-yard, took a survey of the moor from a neighbouring knoll, and returned, scolding Watch for being frightened by the wind among the ferns. In spite of that scolding the dog continued to be disturbed at intervals, barked, howled, and scoured about the mansion, sniffing in all directions, and returning to his rest in the porch with evident disappointment. "I don't like that," said Mrs. Grimshaw. "Watch's father went on so the day before my old man took his last sickness. They may think it superstition in the south, child; but dogs know the coming evils that men cannot see. There is something not good coming to this house. I wish those idle hussies were safe home from their holiday. It's getting late too. Bless me, half-past five!" she continued, glancing at the clock. "We had better be thinking of supper. They'll be every one like hawks. You're looking very downcast, child—thinking of that sad story I told you? Oh! Annie, it makes my heart sore when I think of it yet. But you're too young to be grieving so over other people's tales, and you have nearly finished that cap. Come along and help me to get the supper ready, and then, if they don't come, put your cloak about you, take Watch with you, and go out for a walk on the moor. You'll maybe meet them; but don't go too far for that."

Annie laid aside her sewing, helped to get the



supper ready for those expected to come home like hawks, put on her cloak and bonnet, and set forth on the prescribed walk with Watch. The evening was cold and grey, and the moor, though wide enough, was not an inviting scene. Yet Annie never felt so relieved to get out of four walls and the presence of their rough but kindly mistress. Her mind was a sea of troubled thoughts and memories. The story of Sandy Monro and Honor Desmond thus told to her while she sat making Mrs. Grimshaw's cap in the lonely "Reaper," among the moors of Yorkshire, the girl knew, or rather guessed, to be that of her own father and mother. All the inexplicable recollections of her early childhood—all that old Johnstone had said and insinuated—Barrett Vasey's cross-questions and queer sayings—the remarkable resemblance observed by Mrs. Grimshaw at their first meeting—all convinced Annie that she was the unlucky child that did not die as the Irish foster-mother pleased to report, and Hope was the merchant for whom so many prayers had been offered at Moorside. He deserved them all, and more. How faithfully had he kept the secret, how nobly had he acted the father's part thus taken upon himself, for true love's sake, and brought her up in his home and heart, till nobody in all the world suspected that she was not his daughter, except that strange old man who wished to part them. Was he, in very truth, the reprobate uncle in whose service or patronage Sandy Monro had died of the yellow fever? Mr. Johnstone was rich. He might have made his money by driving negroes and doing all sorts

of wicked work—he might have learned from his ill-guided and ill-starred nephew the causes of his leaving Scotland—he might have promised something—he might have exerted himself to trace out his grand-niece—and his manifest hatred to Hope might have been owing to some collision of interest, for the New Orleans merchant had been in Cuba more than once on business. Barrett Vasey must know something of the story too. How frightened he looked the first night she saw him! The solicitor had come from Ireland—he might have known her mother. And there, again, was the proof of striking resemblance. But Vasey had spoken strangely as well as Johnstone. “They are all dead and gone,” said Annie, repeating Mrs. Grimshaw’s words to herself, as the unaccountable words Vasey had dropped rose to her remembrance. She was by this time far out of sight of the house on the wide moor, and skirting a kind of rugged knoll, partly composed of mossy boulder-stone, and partly covered with very tall gorse, when, as if startled by the sound of her voice, Watch gave a tremendous bark. Annie looked round instinctively, and her eye caught the outline of a figure stealing towards her from among the tall gorse. She had no fear in company with that gallant dog, and at once faced about to confront the enemy.

“Speak to a poor woman two minutes, for God’s sake, my nice young lady!” said a muffled voice; and out of the thicket, but still keeping close under its shadow, came a not very large, but utterly shapeless woman, who seemed to be composed of a succession of bundles,

not the smallest of which was her head. The quantity of flannel and cloth of all sorts in which it was wrapped was so great that nothing but the faintest outline of a nose and chin was discernible; the rest of the bundles were covered with a very old cloak, of the kind known in the north as a red duffle. Was this a device of the adversary to find out Annie's retreat, and bring her to the Court-house of Colchester? If so she had no chance but to stand her ground now.

"What do you wish to say?" she answered, patting the dog's head by way of challenge.

"I'm a poor distressed woman," whined the voice out of the flannel.

"What's the matter with you?" said Annie.

"I have the rheumatics very bad in my head, Mish—that's why I keepsh it covered, you shee."

"You certainly have it pretty well covered; but why are you out on the moor this cold evening?"

"Oh, Mish! I'm a poor distressed woman," and the bundles crept nearer.

"No, I don't want moneysh," she continued, as Annie produced her slender purse. "Look at thish what I'll give you," and a large skinny hand came out from under the duffle, holding a hair-comb, whose sham gold and flash diamonds might have been exhibited with advantage on the stage of a minor theatre. "Itsh worth a hundred pounds and more. Any jeweller in Cheapside would be glad to get it at the price; and I'll give it to you, Mish—won't it look grand in your black hair? if you do a poor distressed woman a good turn with your uncle, Mishter Vasey?"

"I don't want the comb. But what do you want me to do?" said Annie, both amused and curious.

"Well, it's for the sake of justice. I'll warrant you've heard of Spyersh—poor Spyersh! that met with a mishfortune at Sheldon's Bank. They blamed him in the wrong, Mish; he did no harm, but just a mistake in making figuresh—very trying things them figuresh. And poor Spyersh got none of the money, I may shay—it's them Isaacs at the corner of Old Change Alley that got the most of it; and he's hunted about, Mish, like a partridge on the mountainsh, and I'm his poor distressed wife. Oh! Mish Barrett, write to your uncle, and do something for us."

"What am I to write to my uncle?—and what is he to do for you?" said Annie, curtly, for the flannelled head, and the muffled, snuffing, queer-sounding voice that came out of it, had more of disguise and deception about them than she liked.

"Spyersh ish in Germany, hidin' himself in the woodsh and wildsh; but he could tell your uncle something would be the shaving of Mishter Leiton, and your uncle would get the credit, if he would promish to get him off for the mishtake."

"What does Spyers know that would save Mr. Leiton?" said Annie.

"I don't know nothing about it. I'm his poor distressed wife," said the bundles, partially retiring into the gorse; "but if you write to your uncle I'll come back thish day week."

"Mr. Leiton's trial is going on. He will be sentenced before this day week. For goodness sake, tell

me what Spyers has to say, and I'll write to my uncle at once!" said Annie.

"I know nothing about it. I'll come back thish day week; if he is shentenced—they're never in a hurry to hang gentlefolks," and the poor distressed woman plunged through the thicket and over the rocks at a pace which Annie could not have overtaken had she made the attempt. The dog seemed inclined to give chase, and while calling him back the sound of heavy cart-wheels and merry voices apprised her that the holiday-makers were approaching in an opposite direction; and scarcely knowing what to make of the adventure, but determined to keep it to herself, and write to Vasey without delay, Annie hastened to join the company, and returned with them to the house.

When she arrived Mrs. Grimshaw was not alone, as she had left her. Seated on the opposite settle there was a woman dressed in grey, with a large covered basket set on the floor by her side, and a shaggy dog lying at her feet. Annie thought she had seen her honest, intelligent, ruddy face before—but where or how she was not certain, till Mrs. Grimshaw said, "You have got back from your walk, dear, and brought them home with you; and I have had a pleasant surprise since you went out. Here is my old friend, Ann Owens—Flintshire Ann, as they call her far and near—on her way from Sheffield, and calling at 'The Reaper' to remind me of old times."

"Yes, Mrs. Grimshaw," said the traveller, after

dropping Annie a curtsey in due form, "you and I used to see each other often when I travelled the north. Many a good customer I had among the moorlands—and some of them remember me still, I am happy to say."

"Oh! there's worse places in the world than the moorlands," said Mrs. Grimshaw, with local patriotism. "There's Miss Barrett—she's a great lawyer's niece, and come all the way from London—gets on very well here, and looks well too."

"No doubt of it," said the traveller; and Annie knew that her position, prospects, and connections had been discussed between the old friends. She also became aware, as people will on second thoughts, that she had seen the stranger, with her dog and basket, at the door of Molly Spence's shop, in Castleford; that Leiton had described her as one of the county notables—a singular, but, he believed, a reputable woman, who lived by hawking and fortune-telling. Annie had cause to remember her name, from Susan's revelations; and also some cause to fear that the woman had recognised her. There was a glance of keen though covered intelligence in her deep brown eyes when they first rested on the niece of the great lawyer; but Flintshire Ann was not in the habit of making known her discoveries, and took an early opportunity of calling the young lady Miss Barrett.

The holiday-makers bustled in with all their news, purchases, and readiness for supper. The former consisted chiefly of the Essex murder. They had heard so much concerning it in Glossop that the *York Adver-*

tiser was not better supplied with particulars. Round the supper-table everyone related what had been told them on the subject. Mrs. Grimshaw gave a large account of what had been read to her. Flintshire Ann listened quietly for some time, and then, having finished her supper before the rest, got the *Advertiser* out of the cupboard, read it to herself in the chimney-corner, and made no remarks, except when the disappearance of Miss Hope was discussed, on which Ann looked up from the newspaper, and said, "It was very natural that the young lady should not like to appear against her father's cousin, let him be guilty or not." The murder, together with the ribbons, combs, and handkerchiefs bought in Glossop, occupied the household over their substantial supper, and for some time after, till Mrs. Grimshaw commanded silence, brought down her large Bible, read the evening chapter, offered up the evening prayer, and sent them all to bed, informing Annie in private that she needn't be surprised to hear somebody in the next room, for that decent, honest woman would sleep there, and one could not have safer company.

Annie had no doubt of the conclusion. She even felt sure that her own secret, if known or guessed, would be safe with the consulter of the stars. But the girl had concerns nearer than her next neighbour. It was incumbent on her to write all about her adventure with the bundled-up woman on the moor to Barrett Vasey—though what Spyers could tell to be the "shaving" of Mr. Leiton was incomprehensible to Annie. The writing must be done, and there was no

opportunity for it like the quiet night, when that early family were all safe in bed. Going to sleep herself was out of the question. Her mind was too busy with the discoveries of the day. That woeful fragment of her own family history told her by Simon Frazer's cousin set life in a new light before her. Henry Hope was not her father, but he had been such and more to her. She would be his daughter all her days in spite of old Johnstone. Let him make the story public if his malice went so far—it could reflect no discredit on Hope—and for herself, things could be no worse than they were. Simon would soon forget her, if he had not done so already. She would live for Hope only, if Leiton were saved (and Annie did not like to think of the contrary case). They should be poor, but they could go away to some quiet country town. He would get a situation, and she could surely do something to earn and help him. In the meantime, it was requisite to write, and the letter must be got to the Post-office somehow. Perhaps she could trust Flintshire Ann. So, having made-believe to retire to rest as usual, till the whole house was quiet and Mrs. Grimshaw commencing her first sleep, Annie sat in her own room by the light of the long dip candle secured for that secret service, putting all that had passed between her and the bundled-up woman on paper, and feeling, as many a letter-writer has often done, what a roundabout and unsatisfactory way of telling one's experience it was. A quarter of an hour face to face with Vasey would have been more to Annie's mind; but there was no



chance of that, and the trial might be over before her letter reached him. The woman's consolation on that subject might stand them in some stead, but Annie's smile at the recollection of it was suddenly banished by the sound of something very like a groan immediately behind her. The whole house had been asleep for hours, her watch showed her that it was half-past twelve, and, despite her natural courage, the terrible recollections of Castleford Hall made her unable to turn her head for some minutes. There Annie sat, fixed and motionless as a statue, under the freezing power of fear; but her sense of hearing seemed doubly sharpened. The groan came again, but this time it was fainter; then there was a sound of continuous whispering, and the terror passed away, for Annie knew it was coming over the half-way partition from the next room. What company could Flintshire Ann have to talk to?—Annie was a daughter of Eve, and therefore curious. Moreover, it concerned her to know what was going on so near. She therefore stole to a well-known chink in the partition, and peeped through. Flintshire Ann had relighted her candle without being heard, and the honest, pious woman was kneeling at her own bedside, with her hands clasped over an open Bible, and evidently in fervent prayer. Annie's conscience smote her for playing the spy on that most sacred hour of another's life. "Put off the shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground," seemed to sound in her ears as it did in those of Moses. Yet she could not help lingering a moment to gaze

on the rapt and earnest devotion which gave the woman's face an almost angelic look, contrasted as it was with the motionless and watching dog that lay so silently beside her. The spirit of man which goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast which goeth downward, were visible there. Edified, and at the same time ashamed of herself, Annie crept back, and resumed her writing. In a few minutes more she heard a movement in the next room, saw the candle elevated, and Flintshire Ann looking over the partition.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," she said, "but I knew you were up yet, and I want to speak to you. May I come over into your room?"

Annie had no mistrust of a woman whom she had seen engaged in secret prayer, though the proposal was a strange one. "Come over, if you can," she said. "I'm afraid the table will not bear your weight, or I would set it for you."

"Never mind, Miss. I was used to climbing in my youth among the hills of Wales—and the bedstead will help me. Lie still, Trotter, and keep the basket there"—and Flintshire Ann, swung herself down, and came close to Annie's side. You'll excuse me, Miss Hope," she continued in the same clear whisper. "I know your face, having seen it before, and it is not one to be mistaken. Of course I know why you are here—and so you should be—but that's not what makes me take this liberty."

"It's no liberty, Ann. I have been up writing here to Mr. Vasey. Sit down on the side of the bed, and tell me what you have to say."

"Well, Miss, it's a matter about Mr. Leiton's trial that troubles me, and I want you to tell the lawyer; for my mind's made up. If I must stand in a witness-box, and take an oath for it, I won't keep the story on my conscience."

"What is it, Ann? I'll write to Mr. Vasey at once, if you have any evidence to give in favour of poor Mr. Leiton. It is everybody's duty to save an innocent man."

"I don't know whether he's innocent or not, Miss; but I'll tell you what I do know. Twenty years ago at this very season I made my first journey to London. My travels were in the north then. I went up through Yorkshire and the Eastern Counties, having some old friends of my mother's to see in Suffolk. I did some business by the way, but the country was new to me; and, coming from Bury to Colchester one evening, I lost my way, got benighted, and wandered to the banks of the Stour. I know the place well now. It was just above Kitscove, all wild and overgrown with brambles.

"The night was exceeding dark, with great black clouds, which broke up at times, and let the moon shine out as bright as day, one would think, and then closed over her again in pitch darkness. My basket was heavy, and my feet sore; I had not half so good a dog as Trotter then; and, finding myself so near the river, just when the moonlight left me, I stood still among the brambles, waiting till it would shine out again.

"While I stood there in the darkness, a heavy step

came along the river bank below, and the dog came cowering to my feet as if something frightened him. I felt rather afraid, too. The step came nearer. I heard a rustling among the brambles, and a man grumbling something to himself, at the mouth of the Cove. Just at that moment the moon shone out. I peeped down through the bushes, and there was Ned Coster, the carrier, whom I had partly known in Liverpool by seeing him taking goods from the Jew broker, Spyers, I dealt with sometimes. He had left Lancashire three years before, on account of a matter charged against him and poor Molly Spence. She has repented of that and her other misdoings, poor soul!—though it is in her Popish way. I hope she'll never have to answer for them at the judgment-seat.

“But there was Ned Coster, Miss, with a sack upon his back. I could see the shape of what was in it by the moonlight—it shone all the while. He opened the sack and took out a shovel. Oh! Miss, I could see it plainer then—it's a fearful thing to tell you—but in that sack was his poor Irish wife. I had seen her many a time in Liverpool, and knew her face again; but it was spattered with blood, Miss, and so were her clothes.

“Well, he took the shovel and the sack into the Cove. I heard him shovelling up the sand over what he had brought; then he came out and went away up the river banks, as if to the high grounds—the moon kept shining all the while—and when I got my senses gathered, and the fear off the dog a little, I went on by its light, and came straight to Cas-

tleford: a poor place it was then, under old Windham.

"I have never talked of that sight of mine to any living. The whole country know that Ned's wife disappeared quite unaccountably. It was murder, Miss, and the keeping of it has weighed heavy on my conscience; but I was a travelling woman, with no friend to trust in but my dog and Providence. I didn't like to go before a judge and jury, and swear away a man's life, as they say. I have seen Ned many a time since, an evil-looking, ill-conditioned fellow as ever the sun shone on. I never like to meet him, though it often happened that I did; for the Eastern Counties were good quarters for my business, especially about Castleford, where he got settled as sexton. For reasons of his own, Ned partly took up his friendship with Molly Spence again. She thought, poor soul! he was going to turn a Catholic; but, one evening last winter I happened to call in—you were there the same evening, Miss, with Mrs. Berkley and the Squire. When you went out, there was some talk between Molly and me; and Ned, in his unmannerly way, gave me some impudence. I told him for answer more of my mind than was prudent, maybe. It was just a small hint, but Ned took it up, as a guilty conscience will; and, on consideration of his looks, I thought it better to leave the Eastern Counties, and go to my old rounds in the North for a time.

"But the cry of blood has, in a manner, fol-

lowed me. In the paper I read in Mrs. Grimshaw's chimney-corner—she's an honest, decent woman, Miss, the best you could be with—there was Ned Coster giving evidence about bones he had found in Kitscove; the bones of her he murdered were buried there, and then turned up to trap the Squire, and cover his own crime. Miss, when I read that, it was made clear to my conscience that one duty lay before me, which I couldn't pass over without particular sin. Let that Squire be guilty or not, Ned Coster's evidence should not condemn him; and I, who know the truth of the case, am bound to declare it. It was a sore struggle with me, for my evidence may save Mr. Leiton. God knows whether he's guilty or not; but it must send Ned to the gallows.

“Nevertheless, the duty is plain. I have thought over it from the time I went to bed, and couldn't sleep; and I have done what a God-fearing aunt of mine used to do in all her perplexities—opened my Bible, to see what text would be first given to my eye. What do you think it was, Miss? ‘Flee from the fear of man, which bringeth a snare.’ The fear of man snared me to keep silence these twenty years; now the time is come when I am called to speak. You know how to write to lawyers better than I do. Will you write what I have told you to Mr. Vasey; he may summon me, for I am on my way to Colchester. That's why I took the liberty of speaking to you to-night, Miss.”

Annie had listened with breathless attention to that fearful narrative, told in a whisper at the dead of night, when there was no other sound to be heard in the sleeping house or the wide moors around it. It turned the condemning evidence against Leiton back on his accuser—explained the interview she had witnessed among the firs—and made Coster's motives manifest. On his evidence Leiton had been arrested, and was likely to be found guilty; but that attempt at once to conceal and profit by his own crime had brought forward an unseen, unsuspected witness, after the lapse of twenty years, to prove him a murderer.

"If ever the hand of Providence was anywhere, it is in this," said Annie.

"Excuse me, Miss, the hand of Providence is everywhere, and always working, if we could but see it," responded Flintshire Ann.

Miss Hope had received a genteel education, yet she had sense enough to know that the fortune-telling woman from Wales, who travelled the country with a dog and basket, was her superior in age, in experience, and in those powers of thought which schools can neither give nor take away.

"Is he innocent, after all?" she said, laying the thought, which came across her like a sudden conviction, before the elder woman's better judgment.

"God knows, Miss, but the dead don't come back for nothing—and I understand you've seen it yourself?"

"I did," said Annie, in answer to her look of earnest inquiry.

"Well, Miss, seeing is believing; I partly expected it would appear to me in my goings about Castleford, but I haven't seen her often in life, and they seldom come to those that won't know them well. There was another thing, Miss, I had to tell you. A queer sort of a woman, so muffled up that I never saw her face right, wearing a red cloak, and pretending to be in the hawking business, though she knows nothing about it—it's not everyone that does, Miss—is going about Glos-sop, inquiring after the young lady come to live at Moorside. I don't know who she is, but she don't want her face to be seen—making believe to wear flannel for the rheumatics—hidden folk are never good folk, and that woman speaks in a kind of a Jewish way, as I used to notice in Spyers, the broker."

"Spyers!" said Annie.

"Yes, Miss, the broker in Liverpool, that Molly Spence forgot herself with, all on account of the fine gilded things he gave her to wear. As I said before, she has repented of that, and it shouldn't be remembered against her—the old man is gone to his account many a year, but it was his son that had to fly the country for forgery on Seldon's bank, just before your father fell into his trouble, Miss. They were a bad set, young and old. Spyers is a-looking for still, and can't come back to England, of course; they say he went to Germany,



that's the family's native place, but there's a branch of them living at the corner of Old Change Alley; it's a narrow, crooked lane, Miss, leading up from the Old Change to Doctor's Commons—I have heard say it was mighty genteel once, but the place is low enough now; nothing in it but pawn-brokers' and old clothes' shops—the Isaacs, that's the family I mean, Spyers's only sister, married into it, have the oldest and, they say, the worst establishment among them. They were never had up for it, but everybody believes them to be in the habit of receiving stolen goods, smuggled things and whatever they can make money by; and such courses must be profitable, for what they spend in that narrow, dirty lane, and old crazy house, is perfectly wonderful. My cousin Blewitt, that was your father's clerk, Miss—a great respect he has for Mr. Hope and you—was employed for nearly a twelvemonth in the grocery warehouse—I forget its name, but Mr. Vasey got him the situation on your father's account—the warehouse stands in St. Paul's Churchyard; and it's empty now, owing to a dispute between the grocer and the landlord, who wouldn't repair it. Well, my cousin was clerk there for a twelvemonth, and Isaac's house was just at the back—nothing on earth between them but an old brick wall—his room was the nearest, and he told me of their on-goings. Night or day—however late he might happen to be at work—and my cousin was late sometimes, latterly, on account of the moving—he said there was no quiet among them; when they

weren't revelling and feasting, they were sure to be quarrelling, and their quarrels were always about money. There is old Isaacs himself, a man near seventy, and rather lame; two grown-up sons, tall and sallow, without a bit on their bones; and the mother—Spyers's sister, you know—a great fat woman, with a face as red as fire, and earring drops near a quarter long. My cousin knew them every one, both by sight and hearing; he's not very bright, Miss, but I never knew him to say what was not true, and he declared to me that when their quarrels were at the loudest he heard them mention Mr. Leiton and Seldon's bank. Some of the stolen money has gone that way, Miss, as sure as we sit here; and that woman inquiring after you is some limb of the Isaacs' or the Spyerses; whatever her business is, have a care of her, Miss—no doubt you'll go home to your father when I'm summoned, and there's no more danger of having to appear against the Squire."

"I'll take care of the woman, Anne, and neither my father nor I will ever forget what you have done for us and ours," said Annie, who had by this time reflected over her interview with the bundles; and wise and honest as she thought the Welshwoman, it seemed safe to let Vasey only into that secret. If Spyers really had anything of importance to communicate, his own escape would be the stipulated price; and the lawyer should decide before even so valuable a witness was made aware of it.

"It's only my duty, Miss; but it grows late, and my eyes are becoming heavy. I have walked from Sheffield

to-day. Can you sit up and write to Mr. Vasey? I'll wake up any minute and tell you anything you want to know, if you speak to me over the wall."

"I couldn't sleep, Ann. Go to bed, and I'll sit here and write every word. You'll take my letter with you in the morning, drop it into Glossop post-office, and then go on to Colchester. Nobody but Mr. Vasey shall be the wiser till you are summoned. If the trial be over, he will know how to move for a new one."

"No doubt, Miss. Good night, and God bless you! With his blessing, you never need be afraid to sit alone by night or day."

"Good night, Ann. I'll have the letter for you in the morning."

So the Welshwoman climbed quietly over to her bed, and Annie sat writing till two dips were burned out in succession. The cocks began to crow in the farm-yard, and the early daylight shone in through the chinks in the thick shutter. Then, before Mrs. Grimshaw herself began to stir, the sealed letter, of a size sure to cost five shillings for its transit in those days of expensive postage, was handed over the partition to the easily-awakened Ann; and Mr. Vasey's niece took all the precautions in her power not to look like one who had not slept.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE MYSTERY UNRAVELLED.

THE hawkeress and the letter had gone their ways. Mrs. Grimshaw had supplied herself out of the former's basket, and spent her spare time in dilating on the praises of Flintshire Ann, not only as an honest woman, but an able fortune-teller. Had she not revealed to her the death of her old man, and the enmity of the Grimshaws? But no effort, however dexterous and concealed, could bring the landlady of the "Reaper" back to the story of her Glasgow days. To enter on that subject at all Mrs. Grimshaw required the house left to themselves. There were questions Annie would have asked, by way of assuring herself; though the more she thought of it, the more was she persuaded that the tale of the Monros and the Desmonds was her own.

She was giving assistance in the dairy on the

fifth morning after that writing night, and wondering to herself if Vasey's answer would arrive before the bundled-up woman's tryst came round, when the sound of wheels came along the moor. The vehicle stopped at the "Reaper," and Jane came out of the best kitchen to say that Miss Barrett's uncle was come for her.

"Dear me, the great lawyer come here all the way. I'll warrant the murder case is done, and he'll tell us if the Squire's found guilty. I'll run and tell him you're here for your own liking, child. He might think it strange to see you coming from the curds and whey."

And Mrs. Grimshaw bustled in to the best kitchen. But Annie was not long behind her. She had caught a distant tone of the new-comer's voice; and it was not Barrett Vasey's.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I thought you were Miss Barrett's uncle," the landlady was saying, as she entered.

"So I am. My name is Barrett. At your service. You are Mrs. Grimshaw, I presume. How do you do, my dear?"

And Henry Hope, sadly fagged and very dusty, but able to act his part, as usual, shook hands with Annie in the most uncle-like fashion.

Mrs. Grimshaw's astonishment and confusion were too great to remark how the girl's eyes danced for joy at the sight of him; but the two maids agreed that the gentleman must be "oncommon" fond of his niece, and very rich, no doubt—for he looked

like a nobleman—and would leave her a fine legacy some day.

“You must go back with me, my dear. Your uncle Vasey has particular reasons for seeing you as soon as possible,” said Hope. “Here is a note for you, Mrs. Grimshaw. Excuse the haste in which it was written. Mr. Vasey desired me to offer you his apologies.”

“Oh, dear, yes. You must be in great haste now. Is that Squire’s trial over?—is he condemned, sir?”

“Not yet. There is important evidence in his favour expected.”

“Dear me! You’re a lawyer, too, I warrant, sir?”

“No, not exactly; but I am assisting Mr. Vasey, and must go back directly with my niece.”

“Well, it’s all right,” said Mrs. Grimshaw, folding the note, which she had been spelling out. “He bids me to let her go without delay, or she should not leave my house with any stranger—not that I have any doubts of you, sir, but this is a wicked world. However, you’ll have something to eat?”

“Not a morsel,” said Hope, “till we get to Glossop. Annie,” he continued, in the tone she knew, “there is no time for dressing. Throw on your cloak and bonnet, and come away.”

“Goodness! where’s the hurry?” cried Mrs. Grimshaw. “But we are all forgetting the cheese! I’ll be back in a minute, sir.”

Before that minute elapsed and she re-appeared from the dairy, Annie's cloak and bonnet were on, Hope had handed her into the light gig in which he travelled, jumped in himself, wished Mrs. Grimshaw a good morning—he would offer her his thanks and apologies when time was less pressing—and away they drove, leaving the entire "Reaper" in a state of amazement, from which it did not recover till the following Friday.

On their journey Hope explained to Annie the why and wherefore he had come for her, the state of Leiton's trial, and his wonder what Vasey could mean. Annie enlightened him on that subject by an account of her midnight sitting with Flintshire Ann, and her previous meeting with the woman on the moor.

"He will escape yet," said Hope; "though I could scarcely have believed it at one time; but man was never better defended—Barrett Vasey is worth all the lawyers in Chancery Lane or Gray's Inn either. I don't know why he wants me to take you to Park Place, and not to Colchester, as I should have expected; but the waiter at the 'Crown'—I believe he is in Vasey's confidence—handed me a slip of paper with that request on it, together with the note for Mrs. Grimshaw, so to Park Place we go."

As they travelled they talked about all that had happened since they parted. Hope blessed Mrs. Grimshaw for being kind to his daughter; but Annie did not tell him of the revelation she had

given her. Many a time the girl had chided herself for not declaring to him her difficulties and perplexities with old Johnstone and the solicitor; now she had found a solution of the whole matter, there was nothing that puzzled her except Vasey's part in it, which might be only one of knowledge—lawyers learn many a family secret; the story was long, and not to be entered on in the haste of that rapid journey, when Hope's mind was engrossed with Leiton; they would be together when the trial was over, and have time to talk. The journey was made in a style that would have astonished Watson, for they took the most direct roads, travelled without rest, without regular meals, and reached Number Two, Park Place, about night-fall on the second day.

“Oh! goodness me, is it you, sir!” said Susan, as she opened the door to them; “and a messenger from Colchester has been here and fetched a letter for you.”

“Show it to me, Susan,” said Hope; “but don't you know your young mistress?”

“Goodness! no, sir, I never should!—is that the way they dress now in Liverpool?—but maybe you han't bin there, Miss? Oh! welcome home!—ain't I glad to see you once more; and that uncommon hold man's away, goodness knows where—I shouldn't say that neither, for he's gone to the ‘Mother Red Cap,’ sayin' he hated this house and all that was in it—he's mad, Miss Annie, if ever man was; but come up to your own room, and I'll



get dinner for you and the master in two minutes—ain't I glad to see you home once more? And they do say Mr. Leiton won't be hanged," said Susan, wiping her eyes.

She had descended to look after the dinner, and Annie was making some changes on the dress they wore in Liverpool now, when Hope tapped at her door, and said,

"May I come in, Annie? This letter is from Leiton," he continued, as she ran to open; "it was written at nine o'clock this morning; the poor fellow begs to see me on a matter of the first importance, for Vasey is not in Colchester. Now, Annie, I'll start by the evening coach, it goes in half-an-hour, but I'll have time."

"Stay and get something to eat," said Annie, running downstairs with him.

"I have had some wine and biscuit already; an American never forgets himself. Good-bye, darling—Vasey will soon be here, I know."

He darted out of the street-door, looked back for an instant, and was out of sight in another.

"Goodness me! the master going off again! I wish that Squire was settled one way or other; howsomever, the longest day must come to an end—your dinner will be ready in a minute, Miss," said Susan; "and when it's up I'll tell you all about that hodd hold man."

Susan's narrative was lengthy and circumstantial. It commenced with Sam Jones and Miss Leslie's letter, wound on through the intervening events—

not without sundry digressions and interludes of household duty—to the dirty piece of paper, and “Mr. Frazer lookin’ as if he had lost a thousanding pounds.” Beyond that, Susan had nothing to relate, except that Mr. Johnstone had stayed away for days and days, and had come back as mad as ever, gathered up his old books and stones, grumbled something about Miss Hope coming back when she liked, for he would never trouble her, and went off to the “Mother Red Cap.” “For sartin’ he’s there yet, Miss,” said Susan; “for Sullivan, the policeman who looks after Park Place, a sober, respectable man, Miss, though he did come from Ireland——”

“And a great friend of yours, Susan,” said Annie, remembering the stolen interview she had observed at the palings, in former times.

“I must say he is friendly, Miss,” replied the Welsh girl; “there was a bit of a tiff between him and me at one time, ’cause I would have no followers when the master and you was in trouble. After that, I tuck up with that Judas, Sam Jones, and he went to Number Three, but he says his affections never left the steps of this door; there’s no believin’ of men, Miss, especially Hirishmen; and he knows it’s no use, for I’ll never marry nobody as didn’t come from Wales. Howsomever, Sullivan is sober and respectable, and I let him come round a bit on account of the house bein’ lonesome—it’s good to have a policeman about it. Well, Miss, he tells me that Mr. Johnstone is staying at the

‘Mother Red Cap,’ and Mr. Frazer is always a-coming home with him, ’cause, the waiter says, he’s a-goin’ to get up some oncommon business about them there steam-ingines as is to be used in place of horses; and when I was out in the garden, Miss, seein’ that everything was safe, before night fell, I sees him and Mr. Johnstone a-goin’ home quite friendly, by the back way—ain’t he the hodd hold man?”

“That he is, Susan; but the clock has struck ten; I’m very tired, and so are you, no doubt—hadn’t we better get to bed?” said Annie.

The girl was wearied out with that long journey; and when doors and windows had been made secure, with Susan’s customary precautions, maid and mistress retired to rest. Annie scarcely took time to wonder if old Johnstone would do anything for Simon after all, and if Leiton would escape; the hope of both events mingled with her prayers that night, and she was soon beyond the cares and troubles of this world, in one of those deep valleys of the land of sleep, which slope down to the banks of Lethe, and bring us near the dead.

From that dreamless slumber Annie awoke with the consciousness that there was somebody in her room; and her eyes opened upon Barrett Vasey, standing close by her bedside, with a dark lantern in one hand, and something like a small key in the other.

“What do you want—and how did you get in, Mr. Vasey?” said the frightened girl, not sure that it wasn’t all a dream.

"I got in with this key, Annie. It was given me by a noted housebreaker I saved from the gallows, years ago, as a suitable token of his gratitude. And I want your father. Where is he?"

"Gone to Colchester by the evening coach. There was a letter from Leiton, begging to see him when we got home."

"Well, Annie, you must come in his stead. I know you to be a girl of sense and courage," said Vasey. "And you know I would not take you into danger. But there is no time for explanations. The saving of Leiton's life, and the solution of the mystery that has puzzled us all, depend on you this night, and there is not a minute to lose. Rise and dress yourself, and come with me. There—I have lit your candle, and I'll wait outside. Spend no time at your toilet. The place is not select, and there will be no spectators, I hope. But be quick, and for mercy sake make no noise to wake Susan. We should never get out of the house quietly from her."

"I'll be with you in a minute," said Annie. Hope had enjoined her to obey the solicitor in all things, and, strange as the business looked, she had an unshaken trust in Vasey. Her Moorside dress, rough cloak, and bonnet were quickly thrown on. He lighted her down the stairs, with a whispered command to walk lightly. At the street door stood an open cab. "Jump in!" said Vasey. "Sullivan, the policeman, will look after the door. He's waiting at the corner, not to see us."

"St. Paul's, isn't it?" said the driver, in a strong Irish accent.

"Yes," said Vasey, and away they went at double speed.

Susan Griffith had heard through her sleep what she afterwards described as "a rummelin' and a grumme-lin' in the house." The sounds of the departing cab roused her effectually, and with an indistinct sense that something was wrong she ran to her young mistress's room. The candle, still lighted on the table, showed her that Miss Hope was gone. Moreover, she had caught the words about St. Paul's, and the street door was open. There was some villainy, Susan felt convinced, and in her desperation the faithful maid could think of no resource but running to Mr. Johnstone in the "Mother Red Cap." To seize some needful portions of her dress, fling them on, and rush out, was but the work of a moment.

"Susan," said the policeman, emerging from his retirement at the corner, and grasping her shawl, "it's all right. Miss Hope will come back safe."

"No, you Judas, it's all wrong!" cried the desperate Welsh girl, lending her admirer such a box on the ear as made him stagger and lose his hold, while she rushed on to the "Red Cap."

That ancient inn—one of the oldest in the north of London, and said to have taken its name from a Sibyl of former times, who preferred a brilliant head-dress, and prophesied that Hampstead Heath should yet be the centre of the British capital—

was a respectably-kept house. Its tap-room had been long closed—its loungers were gone—its guests and servants all asleep, except one waiter who yawned by the kitchen fire, and two men who sat in the back parlour with papers before them, and candles burning low, for the clock on the mantelpiece was going to strike one. These two men were Alexander Johnstone and Simon Frazer. The papers before them were engineering maps and plans. Their conference had been long and confidential. And now the old and the young man sat looking steadily, but in a friendly fashion, at each other.

"It's a good speculation, Simon, and will pay somebody."

"It will pay yourself, Mr. Johnstone."

"I don't know, lad. Business is far more certain than life. I'm getting old, and not stronger, and have no heirs or relations that I care for, or that care for me. But the habit of making money and turning it to account grows on one, and can't be got rid of, though it's working to no end. So I'll begin this railway work, and make you the manager. It will help you to do something for your honest father and mother. Bless me, is that Susan Griffith's voice at this time of the night?"

"Yes, it's me, Mr. Johnstone. I must get in, and I will get in!" cried Susan herself, breaking in in spite of the waiter. "Oh! Mr. Johnstone! Oh! Mr. Frazer! There's villainy—there's Judas

work. Somebody has come and taken away Miss Hope in a coach. I heard them say to St. Paul's; but I couldn't get up in time. Will you run? Will you see what has become of her?"

"Taken away Miss Hope?" cried Simon, springing to his feet.

"To St. Paul's?" cried Johnstone, "at this hour of the night? What way did they go?"

"Straight down to the Hampstead Road, sir, as near as I can say," said Susan. "But run fast and catch them."

The exhortation was superfluous. Johnstone and Frazer were already in the street, scouring down to the Hampstead Road, both at an equal pace—the old man neither coughed nor halted now. There was not a vehicle to be seen. The Hampstead Road was then as far from London crowds and conveniences as the uttermost end of Wimbledon Common; but they scoured on, and Susan scoured after them, till at the toll-bar she recollected that the street door was open, and rushed back in defence of the house.

In the meantime, the cab which contained Miss Hope and Barrett Vasey had reached the entrance of St. Paul's Churchyard. The silence of a former time, when only the dwellings of the dead were there, had been brought back to its shops and warehouses by that deepest hour of night. The gas-lamps were fewer and farther between than they are now, for gas was new; and there was neither sight nor sound of life as Vasey whispered the driver to stop there, handed Annie out,

and gave her his arm, while he held his dark lantern covered with a pocket-handkerchief in the other hand. About half-way up the churchyard he stopped at an old shut-up house, advertised as "in Chancery," and covered with bills. The small key still in his fingers was slipped into the lock—it opened, almost without a sound, and Vasey stepped in. "Follow me, Annie," he said; "but slip off your shoes first. Make as little noise as you can, and keep close to the wall, going upstairs, for the rail is not safe." Annie slipped off her shoes and followed him across a wide, empty room, with remnants of old chests and barrels in its corners—then into a narrow passage, and up a still narrower stair, with sharp turns, a broken banister and shattered windows letting in a sort of ghastly light from the street lamps below. At last they reached what seemed the topmost attic, judging from its low roof and two broken skylights. There were heaps of lumber; but Annie could not discern their nature by the uncertain light. Vasey drew her close to one of them, pointed to a space between it and the wall where a faint ray of a candle came flickering through a chink, and said, in a whisper so low, and yet so distinct, that it kept about her ears for many a year after, "Squeeze in there as quietly as a mouse. Put your eye to that crevice, and tell me what you see." Annie crept close to the wall and applied her eye to the crevice. It seemed but a crack in the lath and plaster; but through it she looked into a small attic-room, with a bed, a table, and a chair in it, but nothing more, except a candle on the table, and a woman sitting before it, talk-



ing and laughing to herself, though her face was bowed upon her hands. Annie could hear a muffled sound of that talk and laughter through the wall. How like poor Jessie's in her room at Castleford it seemed; but when the woman raised her head and looked about the room, as if she expected to see somebody, Annie staggered back against the lumber heap, and her eyes closed with a fearful remembrance.

"Have you seen her face?" whispered Vasey.

"I have."

"Is it the same you saw looking in through your bedroom door?"

"It is," said Annie; she felt sure of that, though everything else seemed falling into confusion. Vasey moved away to the opposite skylight, climbed on something, and sent a shrill whistle through the broken pane. The next moment Annie heard a thundering knock at a door in the street beyond, then a flare of light, and a cry of fire, that startled the whole neighbourhood.

"It's all in train now. Come along till I get you home. But who has got in? Was I such an ass as to leave the door open?" There were rapid steps on the creaking stair, and a tremendous uproar in the adjoining house. The noise rose higher, the steps drew nearer, Annie heard her own name—she knew it was uttered by Simon Frazer—the next moment there was a sound of woodwork giving way, a long scramble, and a heavy fall.

"Keep quiet, child, and don't be afraid," said Vasey, seizing her by the arm, as she made a rush to the stair.

"Are you here, Miss Hope? Speak there, whoever you are, I see you!" cried Simon, at the door of the attic. It was not he that had fallen—Annie could keep quiet now.

"What the devil brought you here?" growled Vasey between his teeth. "Mr. Frazer," he continued, stepping out and letting the light of the lantern fall full upon himself and Simon, "Miss Hope is here, and quite safe. I brought her for a particular purpose, and a very important one. Who has met with an accident on the stair?"

"Mr. Johnstone, I'm afraid," said Simon. "He would not stay below, when we found the door open, and heard a whistle. Come down, for mercy's sake, and give us light!"

"I wish your neck had been broken too," muttered Vasey. "Take that light in your hand, Annie, dear, and hold it over the stairs, while I get out on the leads and see if they have her safe."

Annie went down as quickly as she could with the dark lantern. Simon preceded her, without a word. At the highest and sharpest of the turns, the broken banister had fallen away, and down in the narrow passage below Annie saw a grey bundle, which she knew to be Mr. Johnstone. Before they got down to him, Vasey was with them. "The business is done," said he; "and the sooner we get out of this the better. He is only stunned by the fall—a confounded place for an old fellow like him. Help me, Mr. Frazer, and we'll take him to the cab."

"Where is she?—where is Annie?" said Johnstone,

coming to himself, as the two men raised him from the ground.

"She's safe and well. Are you hurt, Mr. Johnstone? Lean on me," said Simon.

"I must, lad, for my right leg is broken. Oh, there she is!" said Johnstone, catching sight of Annie, "the girl that would not take a word of my advice, though I thought of her night and day with a father's care. Yes, Annie, I'm your father—your poor old grey-headed father, that you wouldn't come to, though he could have made a lady of you, and has got his old bones broken looking after you, for fear you had fallen into evil hands."

"Are you Alexander Monro, that was said to have died of the yellow fever at Cuba twenty years ago?" said Vasey, holding up his lantern, and standing straight before him.

"Yes, I'm Alexander Monro, and I didn't die of the yellow fever; but my uncle did, and left me his money, and I let the Monros believe it was myself that went," said the man they called Johnstone.

"You're the very man I looked for seven years to shoot," said Vasey, quietly.

"I know you did, Morris Desmond. You weren't lost off the Kerry coast when everybody else in the *Faithful Steward* went down to the deep sea. People don't die every time folk think it. An American ship, wasn't it, that picked you off a floating spar?—and you may shoot me now, if you like."

"No," said Vasey, "I'm done with that folly. You did wrong, and so did I, Monro; but it is all over, and neither of us has got on much the better for it. As for people not dying when their neighbours happened to think they did, we have got proof enough of it this night."

"Have you made out that the woman is still living?" said Johnstone, as if some instinctive knowledge had made the whole of the weird story clear to his mind.

"Yes, I have made it out, thanks to Annie here. I wouldn't have brought the girl to such a place if I could have recognized her myself. Annie, would you believe it was poor Blewitt that first put me on the scent of her hiding-place? The soul never imagined he had made any discovery; but I must bring the cab and get that man home," said Vasey.

"Take me to Hope's house—it's mine—and I'll die there," said Johnstone, as they helped him into the vehicle. "Come and sit beside me, Annie—you have a right to obey me now, in spite of Hope; for I have owned you, and he can't deny the truth."

Annie sat by his side, not knowing what to do or say. Vasey closed the door, and bid the driver take them to Park Place. Simon promised to follow and bring a surgeon. There were still steps and voices in the streets behind St. Paul's Churchyard, but no glare of fire to be seen. The solicitor took one look back at the old house, the

door of which he had carefully locked, and said in a sort of a whisper to Annie,

"They'll soon find out there was no fire at all, but only what they call in Ireland a spitting devil. My men set it up by way of excuse for getting in. Remember, you have to come with me to Colchester by the morning coach. I have sent your father a message to stay there till we all meet in the court-house; for the case is to be resumed to-morrow, and we must have a sufficient array of witnesses to make a demonstration in the recognizing of her ladyship, the late Mrs. Herbert. After being so long dead and buried she requires a public recognition, and poor Leiton's trial has been public enough, not to speak of the other mischief she has done. I wish I could get her hanged for it."

As Mr. Vasey uttered that gentle wish they reached Number Two, and found Susan at the open door. She had stood there wringing her hands and exclaiming to Sullivan, who, being in the secret, and also in Susan's good graces, had kept her in a measure quiet till the cab appeared.

"Where's Miss Hope? Oh, I see her, and Mr. Johnstone. Goodness me! what does it all mean, Mr. Vasey?" she cried, as they stopped and the solicitor stepped out.

"You'll hear it all in good time, Susan," said Vasey; "but help us to get Mr. Johnstone out—he has met with an accident—and make no noise to alarm the neighbours."

They got the old man out and up to his own

room with little difficulty. He did not seem so much hurt by the terrible fall as one would have imagined. Vasey thought there could be no bones broken, he was only stunned and shaken; but as he stretched himself on his own bed, in the room he had occupied for so many months in such a dreary and comfortless fashion, Johnstone said, quietly—

“I shall never rise again. When your business is done in the Colchester court-house, come back and speak to me, Mr. Vasey. You and I may as well keep the names we had reason to call ourselves by.”

“I’ll come back,” said Vasey, with a softened look and tone. “I’m sorry I must go; but here comes Frazer with a doctor—and don’t be afraid, you’ll rise again, and we’ll all be better friends for the sake of the past.”

“I’ll never be friends with Henry Hope—never!” cried the old man, starting up from his bed. “It was he that robbed me of my wife and daughter, when my uncle was dead, and had left me means enough to keep them. He came over her with his wiles and his flatteries, and she cast me off—maybe I deserved it—but it made me change my name, and let my family think I was dead. I’ll never be friends with Henry Hope!”

Here Simon came in with Doctor Ross. It was difficult to find any help at that hour; but Susan had raised the Wills’s household; and everybody lent a helping hand. The doctor found that Mr. John-

stone's right leg was broken. He had brought his instruments, and set the bone; said it was a clean fracture, and there was no danger—somebody had better sit up with him, and he would come again at nine in the morning."

"It's three o'clock now, Annie," said Vasey, as they met on the stair; "we have to start at seven, and I or Watson will come for you about six. I would stay, but there are lots of things to do. It's all true what that old man said; but don't disturb yourself about it, and get an hour or two's sleep if you can."

Annie said nothing; for she knew not what to say—the world seemed turning upside down. Yet the girl felt it was all true; and when the doctor was gone, and Mrs. Wills and Susan had settled themselves to keep watch for the night, she heard the old man order them to sit in the outer room, if they must sit, for nobody but Annie should watch by his bed. She had done it for Hope, and she would do it for him. There was no refusing that appeal, or rather command. Annie went up to take her appointed place, and there was Simon Frazer standing at the door.

"Is there anything more that I can do?" he inquired. "Can I be of any use at all?"

"You have been of great use to us, Simon." Her eyes filled with tears. She didn't know why. The time was a trying one.

"I'll stay below till daylight, if you'll let me," said Simon. "Something might be wanted. And

I can go with you to Colchester. We must all be there."

"We must," said Annie, her dignity coming back; "but it is better you should go to the hotel. Good night, Simon."

"Good night, Annie," said the young engineer, clasping her extended hand. "I'll go there, or anywhere you bid me."

"Come in, and don't stand chattering there, lass; and get you to bed, lad," cried the voice of Johnstone, from within. "There will be time enough for you young folks to talk when old ones are dead and gone. Give me a drink, Annie, and sit down here by my bed," he continued, as she entered and Simon went down-stairs. "Your old father won't trouble you long; and many a girl would be glad to take care of him for what he has to leave."

Annie did the prescribed duties—heard the door carefully closed by Simon. The old man took one long look at her, as he used to do when she moved about his room, then closed his eyes with a satisfied expression, and fell into a disturbed sleep, through which he stirred and groaned at intervals. And there she sat, thinking of all that had happened in that eventful night, till the grey morning looked in. The clock struck six; old Watson arrived in his favourite hackney-coach; and she got ready and started with him for Colchester.

How the week of postponement had passed in that town and its neighbourhood—particularly Castleford—must be left to the reader's imagination. No words could do justice to the talking, the speculations,



the conjectures, and the universal excitement regarding Mr. Fitzgerald's promised evidence. It was generally allowed that every sensible person in the county had a solution of his own for the problem; but let those who can trace out the roots of rumours say how it happened that, early in the morning of the day appointed for resuming Leiton's case, a report that something extraordinary was not only to be heard, but seen, in the court-house, went through the shops and houses of Colchester, and spread into the neighbouring villages. The concourse was, consequently, unprecedented. Long before the doors were opened a crowd more than sufficient to fill the hall of county justice had gathered outside; and the neighbouring gentry seemed to have been specially warned, for no assize ball could have collected them in greater force. It also got wind that an extraordinary number of ladies and gentlemen, servants in and out of livery, had assembled at the "Crown," and got into the court-house by a private entrance, under the conduct of Messrs. Vasey and Fitzgerald.

At length the doors were opened, and it is on record that the police never had so much to do in endeavouring to prevent fatal accidents among the rush and crowd. Most of them got in by squeezing and scrambling. The judge arrived and took his seat. There was scarcely room on the bench for the men of law and mark that accompanied his lordship. The prisoner was brought to the bar; the jurymen appeared in their places and answered to their names; and Baron Cresswick said,

"Well, Mr. Fitzgerald, are you prepared to offer the evidence you promised in favour of your client?"

"We are prepared, my lord," said Fitzgerald, with respectful triumph, "to offer evidence which, we hope, will convince even our learned friend the counsel for the prosecution that my client is not guilty of the crime laid to his charge; for which purpose I crave your lordship's permission to produce a witness not summoned in the usual manner, but absolutely indispensable."

"Produce any witness you please, Mr. Fitzgerald," said the judge.

There was a movement in the direction of the back entrance, and Barrett Vasey handed a veiled lady up into the witness-box. With a rapid and dexterous hand the solicitor drew the thick veil back, exclaiming, at the same time,

"Let all who recognize this lady stand up and say who she is."

"You are out of rule, sir," said Mr. Lawford; but the rest of his remonstrance was lost in the general getting up of people and voices; for half the crowded court-house rose on the instant, and there was one simultaneous cry of "The first Mrs. Herbert!"

"Yes, it is the first Mrs. Herbert—the lady said to be murdered, dead, and buried, for the last three years; whose disappearance has cost an innocent man his reputation, his social status—and might have cost him his life. I know I am out of rule, Mr. Lawford; but rules are sometimes in the way of common sense and justice," continued the triumphant solicitor,

still keeping his place in the witness-box. "Turn round, madam, if you please." And he whispered something which no one else could hear to the now unveiled lady. Whatever it was, Annie could see, from where she sat between Henry Hope and Simon Frazer, that the face, more skinny, more wrinkled, and with more gray hair about it, took, at that whisper, a look of the same foolish, flattered vanity which used to come over it when Herbert made himself particularly agreeable, in order to outflank Russell and Ramsay. But the vanity looked more insane than foolish now, and when the standing hundreds repeated, "The first Mrs. Herbert!" the woman laughed exactly as she had done to herself in the attic room.

"Mr. Fitzgerald," said the judge, as soon as he could find speech or hearing, for the sensation of the court had been visibly shared by the bench, "do you and all these eye-witnesses mean to say that the woman who stands there is the identical first wife of the prisoner, for whose murder he has been committed and tried."

"We do, my lord, however extraordinary—however unprecedented—the facts may appear, the lady has neither been murdered, nor dead, but has chosen to conceal herself. The testimony of so many credible witnesses, to whom she was known for years before her disappearance, cannot be disputed, and there are those present who will prove her identity on oath."

The judge said it was the most astonishing case within his experience or knowledge; several of the county magistrates who sat with him on the bench

recognised the lady, and assured his lordship of the fact; but for form's sake a number of witnesses, including Mr. and Miss Hope, Simon Frazer, the Rothwells, servants who had been at the Hall in her time, Miss Scott, the Maypole, and even the Costers, were called into the witness-box, and without one dissenting voice they declared that the lady presented was the first Mrs. Herbert. There was some difficulty with the poor Leitons, who were so overwhelmed with the surprising discovery that their senses seemed confused and stupefied; but the Reverend Pilgrim was clear and certain on the point—his wife and sisters-in-law were equally so when they got their wits gathered, and everybody remarked that the man at the bar never moved a muscle, though he turned deadly pale, and bent his head so as not to see her when the lady's veil was thrown back. As for the dead alive she appeared to enjoy being the subject of a great sensation; but when Mr. Fitzgerald, to satisfy the court and the jury—by-the-bye, there were six of them who recognised her—undertook to examine Mrs. Herbert on the how and why of her disappearance, she answered so incoherently, that it was evident the woman's intellects had given way under the strange and unnatural process of the ghost-life she had chosen to lead. It was, however, elicited, partly from herself, partly through Vasey's tracing out, that the chief business had been effected by exchanging clothes with Susy Tramp on the banks of the Stour; and the poor, wandering creature, having previously drunk too much gin, had been swept

down by the rising river when attempting to cross the ford the same evening. Hence the floating bonnet and the corpse found at Piper's Pool, and hence, by a confederacy with Miss Law, the supposed dead lady had been enabled to haunt Castleford Hall. Her strange conduct during this period of her life could be fully explained only by that morbid vanity which will undergo any difficulty or privation for importance sake, and the insane thirst for revenge which seemed to have taken possession of her on the discovery of Leiton's correspondence with Jessie. She had chosen to die at first for the purpose of dispossessing him of the bank property; from that ignorance of business too common among women of all ranks, Mrs. Herbert had imagined that it would pass at once to the Rothwells on her decease, and with the connivance of Spyers and his Jewish relatives she believed herself to have secured a fund for her own necessities. That she had made a mistake, and that Leiton retained a life-interest in her fortune, became an additional spur to vengeance, which, having nothing else to do, the woman had planned and executed after a unique and fearful fashion. But in common with all retaliators, she had shared in the mischief she wrought. The secured money went into the hands of her confederates — those at the corner of Old Change Alley got the greater part of it, Miss Law being involved too deeply to betray the secret. Mrs. Herbert had liberty and means to live as a ghost, but nothing else; her brain, never strong, had sunk into a peculiar but irreparable derangement, and had she not been discovered she

would have betrayed herself, for an incoherent and most malignant letter, sent by her to Leiton, was the cause of his sudden summons to Hope.

The extraordinary circumstances of her arrest and public recognition seemed to have completed the overthrow of the woman's reason, of which the whole court had ample proof before her examination was concluded. Mrs. Berkley had been summoned among the first of the witnesses; as the nearest living relative, her presence was thought indispensable to the identification of the first Mrs. Herbert; but the old lady had retired to Tunbridge Wells, there to await the result of Leiton's trial, and though willing to do her duty on this singular occasion, she was late in getting to Colchester, and at this stage of the proceedings made her way through the crowd, with the help of friends and servants, and stood up to identify her niece. The sight of the woman who had warned her, while yet Harriet Windham, against that unlucky marriage, made Mrs. Herbert break over all bounds.

"You may look at me!" she cried, with a burst of insane laughter; "I have frightened them all, and you too, wise as you think yourself; many a night you stood shaking like an old leaf at your bed-room window for fear of me. And those jades that have been living on my money," pointing to the Leitons, "I chased them home—I frightened their old witch of a mother—now he will be hanged, the villain!" It was well that Herbert did not look up to see the malignant scowl she cast on him; "and I'll go home to be lady of Castleford, as everybody knows I am

not like that wax-work ——,”—and with an appeal too strong to be recorded here, she continued to pour a torrent of abuse on the person, character, and history of poor Jessie, to whom, after the fashion of women, sane or otherwise, her hatred was by far the most intense. In vain the counsel remonstrated, and the judge commanded silence; even Vasey’s whispers had no power to moderate her raging frenzy—she went on from one form of denunciation to another, her language growing every moment less select, till, by order of the judge, she was forcibly removed from the court, shrieking, struggling, and gnashing her teeth in all the fury of madness.

The counsel for the defence were complimented by Baron Cresswick, and applauded by the Court, for the ability and zeal they had displayed in making out this remarkable case. But the Baron and the Court got a rather meagre account of the process. As Vasey remarked to his confidants, people are easily satisfied about the doing of a successful thing. Mr. Fitzgerald explained, to his Lordship’s and the public’s satisfaction, that he and his invaluable friend, the solicitor, had reasons for suspecting the lady to be still alive. Of course their minds were not influenced by the popular superstition regarding the nightly appearances—these tales were rather corroborative evidence to them. By vigilant observation, her hiding-place in the house of the Isaacs was at length discovered; and the thanks of all lovers of justice were certainly due to Mr. Barrett Vasey for his exertions in unravelling a mystery which, besides its bearings on the life and character of his

client, had also fostered those superstitious terrors which cannot be said to have passed out of men's minds even in this enlightened age. Mr. Fitzgerald would not undertake to describe minutely the modes of disguise and concealment adopted by the unhappy woman, for the purpose of frightening the populace of Castleford; but he might mention that, at almost the last hour, the untiring search and dexterity of his invaluable friend had succeeded in discovering that the old clothes' cupboard, regarding which there had been so many oaths and depositions, had a concealed door opening at the back on a narrow passage and stair leading down through the thick wall to a kind of cellar under the cottage occupied by Miss Windham. The cellar was dark, particularly at the further end, on which the stair opened. Nobody but the owner of the cottage had entered it for years; and the private communication with Castleford Hall, existing probably from the most ancient period of the building, had been forgotten by later generations, and was employed—no doubt with Miss Windham's connivance—for the midnight walks, of which the whole country had heard so much. The lady in question had admitted the fact. Her state of health did not allow him to press her appearance in Court; but the jury might satisfy themselves concerning the door, passage, and stair; and it was Mr. Fitzgerald's opinion that there was another case almost as important to come before them, as a most respectable witness had appeared to cast light on the subject of the skeleton taken with Ned Coster.

The sexton and his daughter had been among the



most astonished of the recognisers; and, as Mr. Fitzgerald concluded by requesting his Lordship, late as the hour was, to hear the evidence of Ann Owens, to whose character for truth and honesty half the eastern counties would bear witness — Ned elbowed and shuffled his way towards the door; but a policeman in plain clothes informed him he could not get out, and that there was something well worth hearing to come on. Ned shuffled back to his place without the accustomed grumble, and sat there with clownish stoicism, while Ann was called to the witness-box, sworn in due form, and interrogated by Leiton's counsellor. Her testimony was given calmly and distinctly, as it had been to Annie in the small room at Moorside. The barrister made a running comment, and when he concluded Ned Coster was taken into custody by a warrant from Baron Cresswick and the sitting magistrates. Herbert Leiton was then formally discharged, and the court adjourned amidst a tremendous uproar of cheering, and proposals to carry him home in triumph to Castleford. The neighbours and tenantry, who had believed him due to the gallows for years, and poor Jessie no better than she should be, were now in a fervour of sympathy with their misfortunes, zeal for the vindication of their innocence, and indignation against all their enemies. Ned Coster was scarcely safe on his way to the old Castle, where Leiton's cell was thought too good for him. His daughter shrieked and fainted to no purpose in the court-house. Even Neil Carlan stood aloof from her distress. Sharp Keightley got pushes and bad names — though he had trouble enough in taking charge of

the Rothwells. Stones were thrown at the windows of the "Crown," where Mrs. Herbert was in necessary durance; and a coach was being got ready at the same establishment, in which his tenants were vying for the honour of drawing Mr. Leiton home. But Mr. Leiton's mind had changed as well as theirs. Eminently social and domestic, the man's nature had sustained a shock which no acquittal, no return of popularity, could repair. Bravely as he had borne his terrible trial, and unquestionably as his innocence had been proved, the consequences were disastrous to him and his.

"I will have no such noise and folly about me," he said, when his poor sisters had cried over him, and the Reverend Pigrim had given thanks in one of the governor's rooms. "Hope, you have been my first and last friend, and you can speak in public—tell them I am glad they have come to think so well of me—but joyful home-goings are not for a man with two wives living, and both deranged—not to speak of all that I have passed through. We'll wait till after dark, and then go quietly to my sister's cottage—I couldn't enter that Hall again, and never will."

"Nonsense, Leiton, you'll live and be respected there; but you are wise to let them make no fuss now, I'll speak to them," said Hope. And speak he did, from a front window of the "Crown," so effectively reminding the honest people of Colchester and its neighbourhood, of their past conduct to his cousin, and his own estimate of their present frame, that the crowd quietly dispersed to

their respective haunts and houses. Mrs. Herbert was removed the same night to a private asylum in the neighbourhood. Mr. Leiton went home with his sisters, and Barrett Vasey returned with the Hopes to London.

It was late when they arrived, but Annie, and the man she had called her father for so many years, had a long talk together, in that very back parlour where she had watched by his bedside and prayed for his life.

"You needn't ask my pardon, child, I see why you kept it from me—there was no time, no opportunity to enter on such a subject, in the strange circumstances through which we have lived. I am sorry that it should have happened so, sorry that ever it should have come to your knowledge," said Henry Hope; "but for that unfortunate man, you nor any living should ever have heard it from me. I promised that to your mother when she agreed to have me, Annie. You needn't be ashamed of her—angels have been tempted, but she was the soul of honour; in the midst of my first proposal, she stopped me to tell the whole story, with her white hands covering her face, and you lying on her lap. She told me it was for your sake she had called herself a widow, and for your sake she begged me to keep the secret and go my way. I wouldn't go, Annie, and we were married; but whatever that man may say about supplanting him—I met her by the merest accident, on a snowy night, travelling in an open sleigh, with a poor, thin

cloak wrapped about her and you. I lent her mine—that was how we got acquainted ; and never did I know your father's name till she told me in her last sickness, and how he had come the very night before our marriage, claiming her as his wife. I wish he had never found us out—never come about us ; but he can provide for you, Annie, far better than I can."

"I don't want to be provided for ; let me stay with you—you're all the father I ever had, or wish to have," said Annie, flinging her arms about his neck.

"Stay with me, and ten thousand welcomes !" said Hope, clasping her to his breast ; "he cannot take you from me ; and since we love each other, you are my daughter—that makes true relationship, Annie, everything else is but matter of chance—is that Vasey knocking at the door ?"

It was Vasey. He had been upstairs talking with old Johnstone—he had sent Susan over to the "Mother Red Cap" for Simon Frazer, and Mr. Fitzgerald, who, at his request, was stopping there for the night. Their business was evidently brief, for they had come down after some minutes, whispered in the passage, gone out quietly, and Vasey knocked at the back-parlour door.

"I have come to congratulate you, Annie," he said ; "it's as well you should know it, that old man—he's not much older than myself, by-the-bye, though he looks it—and would have done right by you and your mother, if I had only given him time, so you may blame me as well as him ;

well, he has made his will, thinking, I don't know why, that he will never recover of that broken leg, though the doctor says it's going on favourably ; and he has left the whole of his money, in nearly equal shares, to you and Simon Frazer, that neither of you may be tempted to marry for its sake. When I asked him what he would leave Henry Hope for bringing up his daughter, he looked at me like a serpent, and exclaimed, " Haven't I left him too much in leaving him her?—Wouldn't she share the last penny with him, and won't she think me an odd, troublesome old man, and no credit to her when I am dead and gone, and my earnings have made her a lady? But she'll take care of me in my last sickness—speak to her, Vasey, tell her her duty on that point. Annie's a good girl, though she was brought up by Hope; and tell him to keep out of my sight—it's not right to disturb a dying man, which I am, let the doctor say what he will.'"

## CHAPTER XII.

## FINAL SETTLEMENTS.

MR. JOHNSTONE'S, *alias* Alexander Monro's prediction regarding himself was fulfilled. To the great surprise of Dr. Ross, a low fever set in on the following day, and his constitution—early broken by the fatal climate of the West Indies, and not repaired by his efforts in the pursuit of wealth—sunk under the disease within a fortnight. He would see no clergyman but the Reverend Cameron Frazer; and his pious exhortations seemed to have some effect, for, on the day before his death, Johnstone—they called him so to the last—sent for Henry Hope to come and see him. "You are a better man than I," he said, "and never did me wrong. But I don't like you. It's not Christian, I'll allow; but human nature will be human nature. However, I desire to die in charity with you. Be kind to my daughter, as you have always been, Mr. Hope, and let us shake hands." Hope shook hands with him—said he was sorry things were come to this—promised to be kind

to Annie—as he would have been, if nobody had ever claimed her—“though,” said the honest man, “I could never have provided for her as you have done.”

“No, you’ll never be worth a groat!” cried Johnstone. “But you’re the rich and I’m the poor man for all that, and you deserve to be. Share it with him, Annie. I know you will”—and he turned his face to the wall. These were the last coherent words he ever spoke. Annie watched by his bedside that night and part of the next day. His last look was a long one in her face, and she closed his eyes in a bright forenoon, when the earth and sky seemed full of the coming spring.

“I wish it had not happened so. I wish the wealth had come to us any other way. I wish he had not fallen looking after me,” she said, when they assembled to read the will.

“There are very few things that happen as we wish, Annie. Most of our good fortune comes on some conditions we would not have accepted had the choice been given us. We must all pay some legacy-duty to the Fates,” said Vasey. “There is one advantage to be taken out of it, however. That part of our family history can be kept among ourselves. You will still be called Miss Hope. I’ll be Barrett Vasey, your father’s solicitor—famous through the eloquence of Fitzgerald and the Colchester trial. That was the toughest business in all my practice; and if Spyers hadn’t come in lieu of his wife to give you information—because he got too little of the ‘monish,’ and was tired hiding—I shouldn’t have had the credit of it,

and that Jezebel under the ravens' trees wouldn't have shown me the door at the back of the cupboard. By-the-bye, it was to save the Jew that they all escaped being indicted for conspiracy."

"What would be the use of it?" said Hope. "The wretched woman who wrought the whole of the mischief is never likely to recover her senses, and the poor Leitons have been sufficiently exposed."

"They think so themselves," said Vasey; "and have proposed what seems to me a wise arrangement. You are the next heir, Hope, and you have two sons. Annie is over twenty-one, and an heiress—perhaps she would advance money to buy Leiton's right to Castleford. Poor Jessie and the Monros are doing no good to the Hall. She won't be long in anybody's way. The doctor and his women could be pensioned off. I think it would be well if they were sent to Scotland. And Herbert and his sisters could leave the neighbourhood where they have suffered so much, and retire to some quiet corner till time brought changes or forgetfulness."

It remains only to say that Castleford hailed a new Squire before the roses of that summer came, whom all the county families approved, and the tenantry had reason to be well pleased with. Before his coming into possession, Miss Laura Windham was removed with extraordinary silence on her own part—except a declaration that she was dying—from the cottage under the ravens' trees; and, together with her cow and other baggage, conducted to another dwelling provided for her on the utmost bounds of Bury St. Edmunds, where she lived for seventeen years after, much disliked and generally avoided by all her neighbours, particularly Miss Scott and the Maypole,



of whom it was chronicled that both maid and mistress made a point of turning away their heads and uttering some pious ejaculation the moment she came in sight.

Her employer, Mrs. Herbert, dragged out as long a life in the lunatic asylum to which she had been consigned. The superintendent frequently asserted that he never had known or heard of a more troublesome patient; and her ability in getting into other people's rooms, wrapped in white sheets, after nightfall, was so remarkable that nothing but extra payment could induce him to retain her in his establishment.

The victim of her malice, poor Jessie, had, as she merited, better fortune. Her life ebbed away quietly in a sort of decline before the year of Leiton's trial and acquittal came to a close, though her mind never recovered from that sudden eclipse. To the last she smiled to herself; and her latest words were addressed to Herbert, who had come to see her in the asylum where she had been placed when the Monros were pensioned off, and had retired to their native Edinburgh, finding she would be too heavy a charge for them.

"Good-bye, Herbert, dear. You and I must go and get ready for the wedding."

As for Leiton and his sisters, a singular-looking family of old maids and a bachelor brother were known to most of the frequenters of that oubliette of English society, the Isle of Jersey. They made few acquaintances, they did not care for telling their names, and all lived and died unmarried — though ladies thought the brother sensible and polite.

The Reverend Pilgrim continued to officiate in the parish church of Castleford; and in the winter,

after the new Squire's instalment, he performed the marriage ceremony between his only daughter—the heiress who had had so large a fortune left her by the odd old man whom nobody knew to be her uncle till his will was read—and young Mr. Frazer, the rising engineer, who had bought Archibald Leslie's business, when unsuccessful efforts against the railway, and the desertion of Duncan Macpherson—who finally abandoned his cause and went over to the enemy—obliged that determined supporter of the road and canal system to quit the field and retire to Musselburgh, under the conduct of his indomitable cousin, Miss Sibyl, who there managed him and his affairs for the rest of his life.

The years that have passed since our story came to an end have removed most of its actors from what Susan Griffith called this "hearthly stage"—by the way, the Welsh girl lived to share in the good fortune she so firmly believed in when there seemed little prospect of its arrival. The policeman, Sullivan, obtained great ascendancy over her heart, after rehearsing to her, throughout three successive evenings in the kitchen, the particulars of Ned Coster's trial and execution, which took place in due course at Colchester; and the wedded pair were finally established in the "Windham Arms," when the blacksmith and his spouse retired from public life. The Sullivans converted it into the "Hope Arms," and Susan was allowed to be the flower of landladies; but her faith in fortune-telling occasioned some inconvenience to the parish, by bringing too many gipsies and such like gentry about it. Mrs. Sullivan

was accustomed to defend her crossing of their hands by rehearsing the legend of Miss Hope and Flintshire Ann. It was the great tradition of her life, though the celebrated hawkeress could never be induced to foretell or prophesy for man or woman after her share in the conviction of Ned Coster.

His scarcely less notable daughter became so unpopular in Castleford, after her conduct in Leiton's business had been read by the new light, that she could find no patron but Molly Spence, who continued to keep shop and do penance under the new *régime*. Katy's conversion had been consummated in the adjourned week of Leiton's trial. Neil Carlan had assisted at the ceremony. He had also given strong evidence against her father; and when, in Katy's own phrase, she was left a "dissolute" orphan, Neil took leave of her on the village street in the following terms:—

"In course, Katy, I wish you well, and you're the woman that owns my heart intirely. But it wouldn't do for a genteel young man to be connected wid anything of the hanging sort. Farewell, my darlint! if you take my advice, you'll retire from this wicked worl, into a holy convint; and, Katy, don't forget me in your devotions." Whether owing to this good counsel, or an intimation sent her by Mr. Hope, Katy disappeared from that part of Essex, and the last account of her was that she had been particularly anxious to take service with the Rothwells in Caroline Street. Poor souls! their brilliant prospects had come to a sudden close!—and they would have sunk back into despised poverty, had not Simon Frazer remained true to their cause in the midst of his own prosperity. Hope

supplemented his contributions considerably ; and, strange to say, though the bank property was farther out of reach than ever, Sharp Keightley had been so long accustomed to rule, reign, and be listened to in that house, that he ultimately became legal master of it by marrying Augusta. Mrs. Rothwell lived to see the event, but not to be aware of it. She was busy to the last in maintaining the position, and preventing Harriet Windham's match. Her liberal but always disliked niece, Mrs. Berkley, followed her to the grave in the succeeding spring. She had latterly lived in strict retirement at her villa, scarcely seeing anybody but the Hopes. She had no will to make. Her share of the bank property devolved on the still living Mrs. Herbert, or rather on the trustees and Mr. Leiton ; but she left the Rothwells all her chattels ; and, at her earnest recommendation, Herbert allowed them an annuity, which greatly assisted the domestic happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Keightley, the consequence of Miss Sophia, and even the speculations of Grandville, when he got back from Boulogne.

What more is there to tell, but that Mrs. Simon Frazer did ride in her carriage to the Scotch church in London Wall ; and that there was no more want, or fear of it, in the manse ?—for such is the wonder-working power of fortune's wand. There was also great peace and quietness in the minds of the Reverend Cameron and his Nelly touching those points of laxity in doctrine and practice on which their son and his advantageous connections differed from them. The same mollifying influence extended to the Reverend Cameron's congregation. Even Elder McCausland abated

his demand for the sixteen ounces to the pound of orthodoxy, after the second appearance of Mrs. Simon's carriage. In short, the minister and his faithful partner found, as people sometimes do, the evening of their days the best; but they have passed beyond the goods and ills of this world. The church in London Wall has been shut up and deserted; their son, Andrew, is growing old in a better filled one near Hampstead. Civil engineers and railway companies know Simon Frazer as a skilful and successful man in his profession. His wife is neither a woman of fashion nor a philanthropist, but much respected, and more liked, by all who know her; famous also for entertaining all manner of northern cousins whom steamer and train, in our travelling times, bring up to see London. The most remarkable of them was said to have been one Mrs. Grimshaw, from the Yorkshire moors; but the good woman's travels, and her more lengthy accounts thereof, are finished this many a year. So the curtain falls on our *dramatis personæ*. There is a merchant, Desmond Hope, among the many of Liverpool. There is a young Squire, Henry Hope, in Castleford; and a standing controversy among the young and old of that neighbourhood, as to whether or not he will ever equal his father. There is another solicitor occupying Barrett Vasey's chambers, in Gray's Inn; but his name and fame are still great among old men of the law—particularly those familiar with the Eastern Circuit—and when rehearsing his legal achievements, for the benefit of younger aspirants, they generally agree his crowning victory was the Castleford Case.

THE END.

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